

Constructing Spiritual Landscapes: Aspects of Centrality and Peripherality in Anglo-Saxon England and Early Medieval Ireland

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Abstract

Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical identity is firmly rooted in the isolation of Britain from the Continent, but especially from Rome. In order to demonstrate this, many Anglo-Saxon texts will be examined, among these are Bede's writings, Stephen of Ripon's *Life of Wilfrid*, and several others. This perception was founded both in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons and factors directly stemming from the conversion. Because of the nature of the conversion, that is, a direct mission from Gregory the Great, the Anglo-Saxons naturally felt a connection to Rome, while at the same time they felt isolated and peripheral because the reason that they were being converted was that they were a peripheral people. The factors originating in the conversion include the importation of Latin as both the language of learning and as the language of culture among the learned. Having brought home Classical and Patristic texts from the Continent, especially histories, Anglo-Saxon authors became aware of the Mediterranean perspective of Britain. That is, the belief that Britain was a cold, frozen island in the far northwestern corner of the world. The Anglo-Saxons internalized this connection and isolation and it is demonstrable both through their writings and through their actions. For example, pilgrimage to Rome appears to have been an important aspect of Anglo-Saxon religious life for secular people, as well as those in the ecclesiastic world. One might consider that all peoples living on islands in the ocean would react to their conversion in this fashion, however, as will be demonstrated, the Irish provide a counter example to the Anglo-Saxons.

The Irish conception of their ecclesiastic identity was founded on Ireland itself. Rather than acknowledge isolation and peripherality as the Anglo-Saxons did, the Irish constructed their homeland to be holy and central in much the same way that the early Christians constructed the holiness of Jerusalem and its environs. That is, they created a landscape full of holy places and holy people. The method that these Irish authors used to create this landscape was to denote the specific location where each particular miracle was performed. This had several effects beyond the overall creation of Ireland as a holy and central place. One of these was that it connected the reader, who most likely would have been local to the miracle being described, more closely to these holy figures, as well as to the physical and spiritual landscape that they lived in. A second function, which was perhaps an unintended consequence, was to force those wishing to live the ascetic life into *peregrinatio*, that is, lifelong wandering outside of Ireland. Because Ireland itself had become holy in the minds of the early Irish monks, they were unable to effectively be ascetic in the same model as early Christian ascetics, that is, there was no spiritual desert in Ireland for them to retreat into. Thus, they had to leave and go to the Continent or go in search of a 'desert in the ocean'. In addition, an examination of the sources demonstrates that Irish authors used similar language when describing Jerusalem as they did Ireland, which, implies that they regarded the two as significant in holiness. Having constructed Ireland and Jerusalem in these terms, early medieval Irish authors made a strong statement of imagined centrality.

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Abbreviations List

BCCL – *A Bibliography of Celtic Latin Literature*, edited by Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe

HAP – Paulus Orosius, *Historia Adversum Paganos Libri Septem*.

HE – Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*.

OCCL – *Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, edited by M.C. Howatson.

Introduction

Anglo-Saxon and early medieval Irish authors alike worked to construct their place in the wider Christian world, however, whereas Anglo-Saxon authors turned to Rome for spiritual authority, Irish monks instead focused on their homeland's own holiness as a means of establishing their centrality. It is important to note that Anglo-Saxon and Irish authors constructed each of these worldviews in their writings and these constructions created spiritual landscapes that formed a fundamental part of these authors' awareness when writing about their homeland. Spiritual landscapes were created in a number of ways, I will discuss several of these in the course of this dissertation. Anglo-Saxon authors constructed a spiritual landscape as a response to their awareness of their distance from Rome. That is, due to their reliance on the authority of Rome, both in terms of spirituality and in regard to ecclesiastical politics, Anglo-Saxon authors tended to reinforce a view of Rome as the center, which, in turn, placed them in the periphery of the Christian world. The construction of Ireland as a center in the minds of Irish authors provides an excellent counter example to the Anglo-Saxon authors' self-perception, as Ireland was even further from Rome, yet Irish authors in contrast constructed a spiritual landscape focused on the holiness and centrality of Ireland. They did this by describing exactly where each miracle was performed by each saint and where each church and monastery was founded. By concentrating so heavily on each place, Irish authors created a spiritual landscape that infused the physical terrain of Ireland. These spiritual landscapes were naturally rooted in the conversions of these peoples, given that this is the beginning of their assimilation into the christian world. To contextualize the work of these authors in constructing different spiritual landscapes it is first necessary to provide brief comments on the origins of the missions to the Irish and the Anglo-Saxons.

Questions and Problems

There are several questions that I will address over the course of this dissertation, among which the primary is Why did the Anglo-Saxons and the Irish, two peripheral peoples, construct

entirely different perceptions of their position in the ecclesiastical world in the seventh and eighth centuries? However, this problem is actually comprised of two sub-issues. First, is Why did some Anglo-Saxon authors of the seventh and eighth centuries construct Britain as isolated and peripheral? And Second, Why did Irish authors of the same era picture Ireland as being central? In order to examine these questions, however, several fundamental questions must be addressed first. These include, what kind of ecclesiastical organization was in place before the seventh century? How were the two peoples converted? I will examine these questions, as well as investigating several questions that naturally come out of the primary problem. These questions come from the secondary sources, which fill many gaps in these questions, however, they are unable to satisfactorily answer the twin questions that form the primary issue.

Much of the secondary source material focuses on issues that surround questions of peripherality and centrality of Anglo-Saxon England and early medieval Ireland without addressing this topic. For example, Nicholas Howe writes about how the Anglo-Saxons looked to Rome for spiritual authority, however, he does not make any arguments in regard to peripherality. In the case of Ireland, there is more discussion of Ireland's centrality in the early Middle Ages, however, the arguments that these authors make leave out an important facet of this centrality. Two examples of this type of discussion come from Dáibhí Ó Cróinín in his book *Early Medieval Ireland 400-1200* and in Kathleen Hughes' *The Church in Early Irish Society*. Both of these authors attribute early medieval Irish centrality to the fame of Irish monasticism, with monastic schools forming a large part of that fame. My research fills some gaps that had been left in the secondary scholarship on both Anglo-Saxon England and early medieval Ireland. These gaps come primarily in the way that secondary source authors write early medieval histories, that is, they tend to focus on a single people or event. For example, authors tend to focus on the influences that the Irish had on the formation of the Anglo-Saxon Church, yet comparative studies between the two groups have been largely neglected. This is where my work in this dissertation fits into the secondary scholarship.

Spiritual Landscapes

It is important to establish here what exactly is meant by the term 'spiritual landscape'. A spiritual landscape is the image of a place that is created in the minds of authors who are writing about that place. For the purposes of this study, the term is specifically related to ecclesio-political constructs. For example, Irish authors constructed a spiritual landscape in Ireland that was based on the power that was absorbed by places where both significant events had occurred and where important religious figures had stayed. Having constructed this foundation of holy terrain, Irish authors leveraged this landscape to construct an image of Ireland as holy, which, in turn, implied centrality. However, it is the method by which these authors constructed this type of landscape that is the focus of this dissertation. These landscapes are established around certain theoretical constructs, which help to bring certain aspects of spiritual landscapes into greater relief.

Theoretical Constructs and Frameworks

Defining the theoretical constructs and framework that I will be using in this dissertation may be useful here. I will be using the concept of the charismatic locus that Clifford Geertz has defined in his book *Local Knowledge*.¹ While Geertz focuses primarily on the ways in which powerful figures establish their charisma, or the symbolic presence of their authority, he also raises an interesting point about the charisma of places. He argues that these centers

are essentially concentrated loci of serious acts; they consist in the point or points in a society where its leading ideas come together with its leading institutions to create an arena in which the events that most vitally affect its members' lives take place. It is involvement, even oppositional involvement with such arenas and with the momentous events that occur in them that confers charisma.²

His idea that a place can be charismatic and created as such by the people and events present in that place fits into a wider understanding of centers and peripheries, which are concepts that are core to understanding how spiritual landscapes could be created. While this theory deals primarily with the locations that people in a society actually come together at, the concept can be extrapolated to

¹ Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, (USA: 1983).

² Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, p.122-3.

include the imagined space to which authors assign centrality. For example, This imagined space could be the construction, by Americans, of Washington D.C. as the center of the American political world. Geertz's concept of charismatic centers plays a fundamental role in this study, as a method for explaining how these two groups of authors imbued physical locations with spiritual charisma. Based on this understanding of what constitutes a charismatic locus, it is clear that Rome represented a charismatic locus in the minds of Anglo-Saxon authors and that Ireland as a whole was constructed in this fashion by Irish authors.

In addition to charismatic centers, some elements of center-periphery theory will also be incorporated. This is explained in modern terms by Johan Galtung:

The basic idea is, as mentioned, that the center in the Center nation has a bridgehead in the Periphery nation, and a well-chosen one: the center in the Periphery nation. This is established such that the Periphery center is tied to the Center center with the best possible tie: the tie of harmony of interest.³

Translating this into the context of this dissertation, then, means that there are central and peripheral locations which are connected by certain ties, which in this case are ecclesiastical in nature. That is, Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical authors constructed Rome as a central location. By establishing such a distant location as a center, they naturally constructed Britain as peripheral due both to the physical and imagined distance between Britain and Rome.

It will be useful at this stage to discuss the concepts of peripherality and isolation, and, to address the ways in which they will be deployed in this examination. Peripheral refers to the awareness of being far from a perceived center. Peripherality is a constructed mental understanding, which is in direct contrast to isolation. Isolation, on the other hand, refers to actual physical distance between places. The remoteness or isolation of Britain was something that was known not only to Anglo-Saxon writers, but to their Classical and Patristic models.

For a Roman pagan like Pliny, this remoteness was a political matter because the island was the far northwestern frontier of the imperium; for a Christian writer like Isidore or more especially Gildas, this

3 Johan Galtung, 'A Structural Theory of Imperialism', in *Journal of Peace Research*, (1971), p. 83.

remoteness became a measure of spiritual isolation and deprivation.⁴

Anglo-Saxon authors were clearly aware of both their peripherality in regard to, and their isolation from, Rome, which was the perceived center of their Christian world. It is possible to trace how Anglo-Saxon authors constructed their mental landscape from factors relating to their conversion as well as from the conversion itself.

Chapter Outlines

I will provide a basic summary of the contents of my chapters here. In Chapter One, I argue that Anglo-Saxon reliance on Rome for ecclesiastical authority created a sense of peripherality in Anglo-Saxon authors. This peripherality, which stemmed from several sources, is evident in several of seventh and eighth century authors' works and most notably in Bede's. Chapter Two is devoted to early medieval Irish authors' construction of their ecclesiastical centrality. This is demonstrated through a close examination of the texts and their descriptions of the places where miracles had occurred and holy people had camped. Having constructed a foundation of holiness throughout Ireland, Irish authors used this holiness to establish a belief in centrality. Now, I will provide a more in depth summary of the two chapters and also give some necessary background information about the two peoples.

The Conversion of Anglo-Saxon England

The history of the Anglo-Saxon conversion is necessary for establishing the foundation for the arguments which will be discussed in Chapter 1. To that end, a short description of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons focusing on the role of Gregory the Great will be provided here.⁵ Pope Gregory the Great was the ultimate motivator for the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons; even before his rise to the papacy, Gregory had planned a mission to convert the Anglo-Saxons, but, he had been prevented from completing that mission by the people of Rome. After he became the pope, Gregory continued his plan for the conversion of peoples in remote locales, including the Sardinians

4 Nicholas Howe, 'Rome: Capitol of Anglo-Saxon England', in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 34 (2004), p.151

5 For a fuller description of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, see: Barbara Yorke, *The Conversion of Britain 600-800* (Harlow: 2006).

and the Anglo-Saxons, sending Augustine and a mission to Britain in 596. One of the main sources for a description of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons is Bede, who describes the conversion in Book I of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

Qui diuino admonitus instinctu anno XIII eiusdem principis,
aduentus uero Anglorum in Britanniam anno circiter CL, misit seruum
Dei Augustinum et alios plures cum eo monachos timentes Dominum
praedicare uerbum Dei genti Anglorum.⁶

After Augustine and the other monks arrived in Kent, they were given a place in the city of Canterbury by King Aethelberht. Bede describes the missionaries' arrival in Canterbury thus:

Dedit ergo eis mansionem in ciuitate Doruuernensi, quae imperii sui
totius erat metropolis.⁷

After remaining there for several years, subsequent missions were sent out to the remaining unconverted Anglo-Saxons. The mission to Northumbria is, perhaps, the most clearly described by Bede, given that it was to his own people. He writes:

Igitur accepit rex Eduini cum cunctis gentis suae nobilibus ac plebe
perplurima fidem et lauacrum sanctae regenerationis anno regni sui
undecimo, qui est annus dominicae incarnationis DCXXVII, ab
aduentu uero / Anglorum in Britanniam annus circiter CLXXXmus.
Baptizatus est autem Eburaci die sancto paschae pridie iduum
Aprilium, in ecclesia sancti Petri apostoli, quam ibidem ipse de ligno,
cum cathecizaretur atque ad percipiendum baptismum inbueretur, citato
opere construxit.⁸

Bede's account of Edwin and the Northumbrians' conversion emphasizes Roman orthodoxy, as in the above reference, by referring to the specific date of the Easter when Edwin was baptized, while also reinforcing Roman authority through the naming of the church, St. Peter's, that Edwin founded. This is because the date for Easter that Edwin was baptized on and celebrated in 627 was the correct

6 Bede, *HE*, I.22, p. 68. 'In the fourteenth year of this emperor and about 150 years after the coming of the Angles to Britain, Gregory, prompted by divine inspiration, sent a servant of God named Augustine and several more God-fearing monks with him to preach the word of God to the English race'.

7 Bede, *HE*, I.25, p. 75. 'So he gave them a dwelling in the city of Canterbury, which was the chief city of all his dominions'.

8 Bede, *HE*, II.14, p. 187. 'So King Edwin, with all the nobles of his race and a vast number of the common people, received the faith and regeneration by holy baptism in the eleventh year of his reign, that is in the year of our Lord 627 and about 180 years after the coming of the English to Britain. He was baptized at York on Easter Day, 12 April, in the church of St. Peter the Apostle, which he had hastily built of wood while he was a catechumen and under instruction before he received baptism'.

Roman orthodox date for Easter, rather than the heterodox Irish date. Bede's description of the conversion also emphasizes several of the features that came to dominate the Anglo-Saxon spiritual landscape.

These features of Anglo-Saxon England were heavily grounded in Anglo-Saxon authors' awareness of their distance from Rome, which occupied the center of their ecclesiastical world. Their sense of place in the ecclesiastical world was directly due to the aims and ambitions of the mission that had been sent by Gregory the Great, for whom the mission was an attempt to establish himself as an apostle and connect himself back to the earliest days of Christianity (and in fulfillment of prophecy, which naturally influenced those who had been converted). Thus, in the rationale for Gregory's mission, ecclesiastical significance in Anglo-Saxon England was constructed by creating ties to Rome and the Mediterranean.

Latin's re-introduction to Anglo-Saxon England is fascinating because of its dual role: first it acted as a bridge that connected Anglo-Saxon clerics to the wider Christian world, but it was also the vehicle that conveyed to Anglo-Saxon authors the Classical and Patristic perceptions of Britain's place in the world, which could then be internalized by Anglo-Saxon authors whose visions of their island then reflected the Mediterranean worldview through peripheral narratives. In combination with the Anglo-Saxon understanding of Rome's role in their conversion this meant that the spiritual landscape in Anglo-Saxon England was also focused on the authority and sanctity of Rome and Roman figures, hence the adoption of Gregory the Great as the Anglo-Saxon apostle. It is interesting that while Anglo-Saxon authors created themselves as spiritually peripheral, they were following a model for their physical isolation. This is in direct contrast to early medieval Irish authors' construction of the centrality of Ireland.

The Conversion of Ireland

The beginning of the Irish conversion occurred when Pope Celestine sent Palladius north-west to Ireland in 431.⁹ Unfortunately, very little is known about Palladius's life, but it is

⁹ Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Palladius', in *The Encyclopedia of Ireland*, edited by Brian Lalor (Dublin), p. 853.

possible to determine that Palladius had moved in influential circles in Rome, given that Prosper of Aquitaine describes Palladius's assignment to Ireland thus: 'Palladius, having been ordained by Pope Celestine, is sent, as their first bishop, to the Irish who believe in Christ'¹⁰. Prosper wrote in 431, and implies that Palladius was not sent so much as a missionary, but rather as a enforcer of orthodoxy to a people at the edge of the Christian world.¹¹ Both Celestine's and Palladius's adherence to, and insistence on, orthodoxy are reinforced by another reference in Prosper's writings:

Nec vero segniore cura ab hoc eodem morbo Britannias liberavit,
quando quosdam inimicos gratiae solum suae originis occupantes,
etiam ab illo secreto exclusit Oceani, et ordinato Scotis episcopo, dum
Romanam insulam studet servare catholicam, fecit etiam barbaram
christianam.¹²

In addition to discussing his orthodoxy, Prosper records Palladius's efforts as bishop of the Irish in this citation. Prosper implies that while he may not have been sent for the purpose of converting the Irish, Palladius undertook that task. Based on this understanding of Palladius's role in Irish conversion, it becomes more apparent why later Irish authors chose to characterize St. Patrick as their apostle.

The other major figure in the conversion of Ireland was Saint Patrick, who, we are able to determine from his own writings, such as his *Confessio*, was born in Britain in the early fifth century and lived in or near a town named Bannaventa Berniae. Patrick's own account of his birth and home comes from the *Confessio*, and is

Ego, Patricius, peccator, rusticissimus et minimus omnium fidelium,
et contemptibilissimus apud plurimos, patrem habui, Calpornium
diaconum, filium quendam Potiti, presbyteri, qui fuit uico Bannauenta
Berniae.¹³

¹⁰ Prosper, *Epitoma Chronicon*, s.a. 431, ed. T. Mommsen, *MGH AA 9* (Berlin: 1892), I.473

¹¹ This is in reference to Palladius's siding with the Augustinians against the Pelagians. For more information see: Prosper, *Epitoma Chronicon*, s.a. 431.

¹² Prosper, *Liber Contra Collatorem*, Pat. Lat. XLV, Ch. XXI.58 p. 1831. 'He [Celestine] has been, however, no less energetic in freeing the British provinces from this same disease [Pelagianism]: he removed from that hiding-place certain enemies of grace who had occupied the land of their origin; also, having ordained a bishop for the Irish, while he labors to keep the Roman island catholic, he has also made the barbarian island Christian.'

¹³ Patrick, *Confessio*, edited and translated by D.R. Howlett (Dublin: 1994), Part I, p. 53. 'I, Patrick, a sinner, very rustic and the least of all the faithful, and very contemptible in the estimation of most men, had as father a certain man called Calpornius, a deacon, son of Potitus a presbyter, who was in the town of Bannaventa Berniae'.

All that may be determined from his *Confessio*, is that at the age of sixteen Patrick was captured and sold into slavery in Ireland at the wood of Voclut. After several years of captivity he became a Christian (having been indifferent to the faith previously) and escaped.¹⁴ Patrick managed to secure passage on a ship to the Continent and, after some time spent wandering, returned to his family in Britain. Patrick's motivation for his mission to Ireland came to him in a dream, and he writes that he saw

uirum uenientem quasi de Hiberione cui nomen Uictoricus cum
epistolis innumerabilibus, et dedit mihi, unam ex his et legi,
principium epistolae continentem 'Uox Hiberionacum', et cum
recitabam principium epistolae putabam ipso momento audire uocem
ipsorum qui erant iuxta siluam Uocluti, quae est prope mare
occidentale et sic exclamauerunt 'quasi ex uno ore', "Rogamus te
sancte puer, ut uenias et adhuc ambulas inter nos".¹⁵

After his dreams, it appears that Patrick went to Gaul, where he studied and was ordained bishop before returning to Ireland to begin his mission. He arrived in Auxerre and remained there for forty years, before returning to Ireland.¹⁶ Such was the impact and success of his mission that St. Patrick's journeys and miracles came to form a significant portion both of the recorded holiness of Ireland and the core of ecclesiastical authority in Ireland.¹⁷

Irish authors in the seventh and eighth centuries, unlike their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, anchored their spiritual landscape on the physical terrain of Ireland. This was done by specifically mentioning the places where miracles occurred and by naming all the monasteries, churches and cells founded by important saints. It is possible to determine that the Irish authors created a strong, spiritually rich, and monastically focused landscape in places that were deemed spiritually important: that is, Ireland and Jerusalem, which explains why Britain did not receive the same type of treatment by Irish authors. Britain's relatively minor place in these accounts reveals two items

14 Patrick, *Confessio*, Part II, pp. 61-3.

15 Patrick, *Confessio*, Part II, pp. 67. Translation: 'a man coming as if from Ireland, whose name [was] Victoricius, with innumerable epistles, and he gave me one of them, and I read the beginning of the epistle containing 'the Voice of the Irish', and while I was reciting the beginning of the epistle I kept imagining hearing at that very moment the voice of those very men who were beside the Forest of Foelut... and thus they shouted out as if from one mouth, "We request you, holy boy, that you come and walk farther among us"'. p. 4

16 Muirchu, *Vita Patricii*, pp. 71-3.

17 This is indicated in many of the sources that will be examined in great depth in Chapter 2.

about Ireland and Britain in the seventh century. First, that Britain was not a spiritually significant location to the Irish, and in fact, was a destination for peregrini, which implies that it constituted a spiritual 'desert'. Secondly, when combined with the controversy between the Irish and the Anglo-Saxons over the calculation of the date of Easter and the Irish attitude towards the Pope,¹⁸ these spiritual landscapes were used in ecclesiastical disputes. Using spiritual landscapes as weapons in disputes is further demonstrated when the primatial dispute is taken into consideration. Both Armagh and Kildare's claims for primacy in Ireland were based on the spiritual landscapes that their patrons had created. The power that these places had in the minds of early medieval Irish authors' minds is clearly demonstrated throughout their writings and influenced the way that they constructed the spirituality of their homeland.

Conclusion

Tracing the establishment of spiritual landscapes provides a new way of interpreting the extant source material for both Anglo-Saxon England and early medieval Ireland. It explains why the Anglo-Saxons often use language in their writings that calls upon an assumption of their peripherality and also why they chose to focus so strongly on Rome, rather than on Jerusalem, the place one would, perhaps, expect to see as the center of the Christian world. It also indicates some of the reasons why Irish authors constructed their land as the center, by contrast to the Anglo-Saxon authors' peripherality. By imbuing the physical geography of their island with spiritual power they constructed Ireland as a holy place, which had far reaching repercussions not only on the ways in which early medieval Irish monks debated Church hierarchy and Irish centrality, but also on those wishing to live the ascetic life. Since Ireland had been constructed as a holy locale, Irish ascetics were forced to leave Ireland in order to practice asceticism. The establishment of these spiritual landscapes had a profound influence on the way that authors in these two places imagined their place in the ecclesiastic world. Having briefly touched on the sources, both secondary and primary, and the arguments that I will be using throughout this dissertation, I will now begin a closer

18 This is demonstrated in Columbanus, *Epistola I*, ed. and trans. G.S.M. Walker (Dublin: 1957), p. 2.

examination of the questions that were outlined above.

Chapter 1: 'People at the Edge of the World': The Construction of an Isolated and Peripheral Spiritual Landscape in Anglo-Saxon England

The Anglo-Saxons have been variously described as a 'gens in finem mundi'¹⁹, a people 'in mundi angulo posita'²⁰, and 'penitus toto divisos orbe Britanos'.²¹ Gregory the Great, the instigator of the mission to Anglo-Saxon England and the apostle of the Anglo-Saxons, provides the first two of these citations and the third comes from Vergil's *Eclogues*. None of is unique in their portrayal of Britain or the Anglo-Saxons and this perception came to the Anglo-Saxons through one of the most significant events in their history, that is, their conversion. Unlike many of the barbarian kingdoms in north-western Europe, the Anglo-Saxons were converted by a direct mission from Rome, which, as will be seen, had a huge impact on the formation of the Anglo-Saxon spiritual landscape. The impetus for conversion among many early medieval missionaries, as will be seen in further detail in Chapter 2, comes from Matt 24:14²², 'Et praedicabitur hoc evangelium regni in universo orbe in testimonium omnibus gentibus et tunc veniet consummatio' and Rom. 10:18 'Sed dico numquid non audierunt et quidem in omnem terram exiit sonus eorum et in fines orbem terrae verba eorum'²³, as direction for where and whom they ought to be converting.

Gregory the Great was among those who were concerned with the conversion of peoples at the ends of the earth, and though he was prevented from going to Britain himself as a missionary, after his election to the papacy, he sent a mission to Britain to convert the Anglo-Saxons. His personal interest in converting the Anglo-Saxons led to their belief that he was their apostle, which, in turn had a profound impact on the creation of Anglo-Saxon awareness of isolation and

19 Gregory the Great, *Registrum Epistularum*, from *Corpus Christianorum*, edited by Dag Norberg (Turnhout: Brepols, 1982), Letter 8.29 p. 524, Translation: 'people at the edge of the world' from Gregory, *Letters*, p. 524.

20 Gregory the Great, *Registrum Epistularum*, Letter 8.29, p. 551. Translation: 'the people of the English who live in a corner of the world' from Gregory the Great, *Letters*, trans. By John R.C. Martyn (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2004), p. 524.

21 Virgil, *Eclogues*, edited and translated by H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1999), Eclogue 1, p. 28. Translation: 'and the Britons, wholly sundered from all the world'.

22 Matt. 24:14. Translation: 'And this gospel of the kingdom, shall be preached in the whole world, for a testimony to all nations, and then shall the consummation come.' From (Douay-Rheims).

23 Rom. 10:18 Translation: 'But I say: Have they not heard? Yes, verily, their sound hath gone forth into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the whole world.' From (Douay-Rheims).

peripherality. Anglo-Saxon authors created a landscape that was populated by local saints and places, however, the primary emphasis in the writings of Anglo-Saxon authors was on Rome and the pope. This served, when combined with other factors relating to the conversion, to emphasize the distance, both spiritual and physical, from Rome, the charismatic center of the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical world, which heightened the awareness of peripherality that comes through several Anglo-Saxon texts, though primarily in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

The mission to the Anglo-Saxons had another effect, however. Because the missionaries were sent with the understanding that they were converting a people 'at the edge of the world', they likely brought this understanding with them, having been educated in the Mediterranean, which may have influenced their preaching and conversion efforts.²⁴ That is, the Anglo-Saxons were special and their conversion would hasten the end of the world,²⁵ but the fact that they were special was inherently based on their isolation and peripherality. This is suggested by the fact that isolation is treated in a matter of fact fashion, rather than authors longing for closeness to the center, however, this all changes when Rome is being referred to. Anglo-Saxon apocalyptic awareness can potentially be explained through the method of conversion, as unlike other barbarian peoples, who were converted by the conquered people in their territory, see Frankish Gaul and Gothic Iberia for example, the Anglo-Saxons were converted by a direct mission from Rome. The Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical relationship with Rome was a unique relationship in the early medieval world and it formed the foundation of the Anglo-Saxon awareness of peripherality, which was heightened by factors that directly stem from the conversion.

One of these factors is the re-importation of Latin along with Roman Christianity into Anglo-Saxon England. This had a significant effect on Anglo-Saxon authors' perceptions of their place in the world, as it formed both a bridge to the wider Christian world and its literary traditions,

24 Nicholas Howe, 'Rome: The Capital of Anglo-Saxon England', p. 167. 'Casting themselves on the north, along the periphery, gave both dramatic and spiritual coherence to their history.'

25 This is demonstrated in the apocalyptic nature of some of both Gregory the Great's and Bede's writings, particularly the *Letters* of Gregory and Bede's *De Temporum Ratione*.

as well as demonstrating the place of Britain in those works. The impact of the re-introduction of Latin can be demonstrated in a number of ways. The first of these is simply that, having been connected to a much wider world, educated Anglo-Saxons, in the course of their education, would have been exposed to Classical and Patristic texts such as Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, Paulus Orosius's *Historia Adversum Paganos Libri Septem*, and Pliny the Elders' *Naturalis Historia*, which describe Britain as being isolated and peripheral. When combined with the position that Rome occupied in the minds of seventh and eighth century Anglo-Saxon authors, the education of these authors indoctrinated them in how remote and isolated they were, especially in regard to Rome. Anglo-Saxon awareness of distance, both geographic and imagined, would have primarily occurred through the teaching of histories, some of which, like Isidore's *Etymologiae*, were mentioned above, that would have been imported either with, or in the first century after, the conversion.²⁶

Classical and Patristic historical texts without exception, when describing Britain, portray it as being separated from the rest of the world. As Isidore of Seville writes in the *Etymologiae*:

'Brittania Oceani insula interfuso mari toto orbe divisa, a vocabulo suae gentis cognominata.'²⁷

A typical description of Britain, this sentiment is echoed in other writings, for example, the *Historiarum Adversum Paganos* by Paulus Orosius. In this work, he describes Britain in much the same light as Isidore of Seville.

Britannia oceani insula per longum in boream extenditur; a meridie Gallias habet. Cuius proximum litus transmeantibus ciuitas aperit, quae Rutupi portus; unde haud procul a Morinis in austro positos Menapos Batausque prospectat. Haec insula habet in longo milia passum DCCC, in lato millia CC²⁸.

26 For more on this, see Wilhelm Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century*, *St Augustine and the Conversion of England*, ed. By Richard Gameson, and Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*.

27 Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, edited by W.M. Lindsay (Oxford: 1957), Book XIV.vi.2 Translation: 'Britannia is an island of the Ocean, cut off from the whole globe by the intervening sea; it takes its name from the name of its inhabitants'. Translation from: Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, translated by Stephen A. Barney, J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge: 2006), p. 294.

28 Paulus Orosius, *HAP*, I.2 p. 28-9. Translation: 'Britain is an island in the Ocean that extends far to the north; to its south it has Gaul. On the closest shore to which one can cross, there is a city called the Port of Rutupus which looks across to the land of the Menapians and the Batavians, who lie at no great distance from the Morini to their south. The island is 800 miles long and 200 miles wide.' Translation from: Orosius, *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, trans. A.T. Fear, (Liverpool: 2010), p. 45.

In addition to emphasizing Britain's isolation, these descriptions, both of which come from Classical or Patristic histories, also locate Britain in *Oceanus*. By associating Britain with *Oceanus* rather than with one of the myriad seas that were known at the time, Classical and Patristic authors constructed Britain as inherently separated from the known world.

The portrayal of *Oceanus* by Classical and Patristic authors, as well as the description given in the Bible strengthens the image that the Ocean and locations associated with it are peripheral. This is in contrast to the perception of seas, which were known and associated with central places. For example, the Mediterranean was perhaps the most geographically central place that was known to Classical and Patristic authors, and is regarded similarly in the Bible. As O'Loughlin argues, the distinction between sea and Ocean is quite significant, because the ocean is:

qualitatively different from other waters in that it was at the very limit of inhabitable reality and its shore marked the point of the separation between the waters and the dry land (Gen I.9). This was the primeval 'abyss' (Gen I.2), the home of Leviathan (cf Job 41.23 for example)... it was also connected with the abode of demons (Luke 8.31) and Satan (Rev 20.1-3) and from it, at the end of time, the apocalyptic beast would arise to bring destruction to mankind (Apoc 11.7; 17.8). This threatening aspect of the Ocean seems to be present in most biblical references: it is a place of power and darkness, and is always to be treated with caution²⁹.

Whereas the seas, as described above, were well known to authors in the Classical and Late Antique eras, the Ocean, represented an unknown quantity. The portrayal of the Ocean and its islands as peripheral is highlighted in what was to become the standard map of the medieval world. With Jerusalem thus placed at the center of the world, as O'Loughlin argues, the ocean described the periphery of the world, which meant that all of the islands of the ocean were also of a peripheral nature³⁰ and thus Britain's status, that is, as isolated and peripheral in the minds of Classical, Patristic, and early medieval authors.

It is clear from Classical and Patristic sources, as described above, that Anglo-Saxon

29 Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Living in the Ocean', in *Studies in the Cult of Saint Columba*, edited by Cormac Bourke (Dublin: 1997), pp. 11-24 at p. 13.

30 O'Loughlin, 'Living in the Ocean', p. 19.

ecclesiastics looked to Rome as the center of both their ecclesiastical and spiritual world and that they inherited a Roman vision of the world.³¹ There is indeed a distinction to be drawn between ecclesiastical and spiritual, as by ecclesiastical I mean the actual Church, hierarchically and politically. By spiritually, I mean the image of Rome in the imaginations of both the ecclesiastical and secular Anglo-Saxons. The major outcome of this representation of Rome as the center of the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical world was that Anglo-Saxon authors worked strenuously to draw connections to Rome, both personally and institutionally in order to close the imagined distance between Britain and Rome. Institutionally speaking, the Anglo-Saxon Church relied on Rome and the pope as the final arbiter of ecclesiastical disputes, as well as for a model of orthodoxy upon which they structured themselves. On an individual scale, some Anglo-Saxons, from both the ecclesiastical and secular spheres, went to Rome on pilgrimage. These pilgrims came from all sections of society from kings and bishops to merchants and monks. The number of travelers who went to Rome from Anglo-Saxon England throughout the Anglo-Saxon period is illustrative of the importance of Rome in the minds of the Anglo-Saxons.³² I will begin my examination of the role of Rome in the minds of Anglo-Saxon authors from the beginning of Rome's importance to the Anglo-Saxons, that is, the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, and, in particular, of the apostle of the Anglo-Saxons, Gregory the Great.

The Conversion

As the instigator of the mission to the Anglo-Saxons, Gregory the Great was often referred to, as the apostle to the Anglo-Saxons, particularly by Anglo-Saxon authors, an example of this is in the earliest *Vita Sancti Gregorii I Papae* and Bede's *HE* is another. Adopting Gregory the Great as the Anglo-Saxon apostle had wide reaching implications on the formation the Anglo-Saxon spiritual

31 See Robert W. Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain from Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York: 1966) for more on this.

32 For a complete list of known travellers to Rome with descriptions of social status, see Appendices 2 and 4 in: Stephen Matthews, *The Road to Rome: Travel and Travellers Between England and Italy in the Anglo-Saxon Centuries*, BAR International Series 1680 (2007).

landscape, not the least of which was his motivation for his mission to the Anglo-Saxons, which can be demonstrated to have been a result of Gregory's apocalyptic concerns.

Gregory observed that, at the Last Judgement, each bishop would come before the Lord with the souls he had gained for Heaven. Peter would come with his converts in Judaea, Paul with the Gentile world, Andrew with those in Achaea, John with those in Asia and Thomas with those in India. 'But what will we poor wretches say?' Gregory's fear was that the Church of his day, beset with crises from all directions, would only have a 'Nil return' to offer.³³

It can also be demonstrated that the Anglo-Saxon authors' appropriation of Gregory as their apostle was a natural occurrence, since Gregory can be shown to have thought of himself in the same fashion.³⁴ Association of Gregory with the Anglo-Saxons was something that can be demonstrated to have been present in England from the century after the conversion, as in the earliest *Vita Sancti Gregorii I Papae*, which was written by an anonymous monk or nun at Whitby between 704-714. Bede also describes Gregory the Great in these terms in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*. He writes that 'Quem recte nostrum appellare possumus et debemus apostolum quia.'³⁵ The traditions and miracles that the earliest *Vita Sancti Gregorii I Papae* contains about Gregory would have been in circulation for some time before the writing of the *Vita*, which demonstrates that the presence of Gregory the Great had been in the Anglo-Saxons' minds from very early on in the history of their christianity. The anonymous author of the *Vita Sancti Gregorii I Papae* demonstrates the Anglo-Saxon appropriation of Gregory thus:

Iuxta cuius sententiam quando omnes apostoli, suas secum provincias
ducentes / Domino in die iudicii ostendent, atque singuli gentium
doctores, nos ille, id est gentem Anglorum, eo miratius per se gratia
Dei credimus edoctam adducere³⁶.

In addition to claiming Gregory as their apostle, the anonymous author presents the apostles in an apocalyptic framework, as above, which provides further evidence for the idea that the Anglo-

33 John R. C. Martyn, 'Introduction', *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, (Toronto: 2004), p. 48.

34 John R. C. Martyn, 'Introduction', *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, p. 66.

35 Bede, *HE*, II.1, p. 123. 'We can and should by rights call him our apostle.'

36 Anonymous, *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, Chapter 6, p. 82-3. 'When all the apostles bring their own peoples with them and each individual teacher brings his own race to present them to the Lord in the Day of Judgment, [Gregory] will bring us –that is, the English people-- instructed by him through God's grace', translation from *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: 1968), p. 82-3.

Saxons were converted both under the influence of apocalyptic prophecy and that the missionaries may have also used apocalyptic imagery. Again, in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Gregory is referred to as the English Apostle.

Quem recte nostrum appellare possumus et debemus apostolum quia, cum primum in toto orbe gereret pontificatum et conuersis iamdudum ad fidem ueritatis esset praelatus ecclesiis, nostram gentem eatenus idolis mancipatum Christi fecit ecclesiam³⁷.

Bede's depiction of Gregory the Great as the apostle to the Anglo-Saxons, unlike the anonymous author of the *Vita Sancti Gregorii I Papae*, is framed within a missionary picture, that is, rather than presenting him using apocalyptic imagery as Martyn illustrates above, Bede is more concerned with highlighting Gregory's role in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, as he described Gregory as having 'made our nation, till then enslaved to idols, into a true Church of Christ'. Bede's text also demonstrates the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical perception that Rome was 'the most important see in the whole world'. It is also telling that the Anglo-Saxon *Vita Sancti Gregorii I Papae* is the earliest *Vita* of Gregory the Great, rather than a Roman text.

As the author of the earliest *Vita* was aware, however, he or she had a dearth of information about Gregory, at least insofar as his miracles were concerned. The author writes that

De quo librum scribere cupientes cum pauca eius de gestis audiuimus signorum, nec fastidium sit legentibus precamur, si aliquid de laude tanti viri loquamur uberius.³⁸

The indication that the anonymous author gives here, as Colgrave argues, is that 'there is no extant *Liber de virtutibus* such as was to be found in the case of other saints',³⁹ which made writing the *Vita* more difficult for the monk or nun who compiled it, because it forced these authors to seek out traditions about Gregory. Due to the author's use of traditions otherwise unknown at the time of

37 Bede, *HE*, eds. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), II.1 p. 122. 'We can and should by rights call him our apostle, for though he held the most important see in the whole world and was head of Churches which had long been converted to the true faith, yet he made our nation, till then enslaved to idols, into a true Church of Christ'. Translation from *Ibid*.

38 Anonymous, *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, Chapter 3, p. 77. 'We wish to write a book about him, though, in the record of his deeds, we have heard of few miracles: but we pray our readers not to feel distaste if we praise the great man somewhat exuberantly'.

39 Bertram Colgrave, *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, p. 50.

writing, he or she gives the modern scholar information that does not appear elsewhere until later, if at all. As Thacker describes, the author of the *Vita Sancti Gregorii I Papae* used traditions about Gregory and language that demonstrates significant knowledge of the city and environs of Rome to construct the *Vita*.

There are several indications that the Whitby author had access to reliable tradition otherwise unknown in England. In particular, he alone among the early sources recorded the name of Gregory's mother, Silvia. We know that he was right about that because the pope's ninth-century Roman biographer, John the Deacon, stated that she was so named in a portrait in the family monastery on the Celian hill. Other information probably obtained directly from Rome included the identity of the pope whose permission Gregory sought for his abortive attempt to visit England: Benedict I (574-9) was not mentioned by Bede or Paul the Deacon, author of a late-eighth-century *Life of Gregory*. Similarly, the circumstantial detail in the story of Gregory's flight after his election to the papacy indicated a source acquainted with the local topography of Rome, while the authenticity of the flight itself was confirmed in a near contemporary report by a deacon of Tours.⁴⁰

As Thacker argues, the author's reliance on Roman sources reveals the connection to Rome that the Anglo-Saxons sought, and that the Anglo-Saxons were concerned enough about Gregory to have sought out Roman traditions about him. Martyn argues that 'Gregory, as the successor of Peter, was proposed as the point of unity for all Christians, and as the foundation of the Christian faith of the English'⁴¹. As the foundation of English Christianity, the appropriation of Gregory by Anglo-Saxon authors established strong ties with Rome, and as the focal point of Anglo-Saxon Christianity, the appropriation of his person reinforced the perception, among Anglo-Saxon authors, of their imagined distance from Rome.

Pope as Arbiter

The use of the pope as the final arbiter in Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical disputes strengthened reliance on Rome, which, in turn, reinforced the perception of Rome as the center of the Anglo-

⁴⁰ Thacker, 'Memorializing Gregory the Great', p. 64.

⁴¹ John R.C. Martyn, 'Introduction', in *Letters*, p. 59.

Saxon ecclesiastical world. The primary evidence for papal arbitration is in Stephen of Ripon's *Vita* of Wilfrid, however, the pope is discussed in this capacity in the *HE*, as well. The first mention in relation to the Anglo-Saxons, however, of going to the pope, physically or through letters, in order to settle questions or disputes, is in Augustine's *Libellus Responsionum*, which was a series of questions on ecclesiastical procedural points and Gregory the Great's responses. Question VII of the *Libellus*, 'Qualiter debemus cum Galliarum atque Britanniarum episcopis agere?'⁴², provides an interesting picture of the earliest days of the Church hierarchy in Anglo-Saxon England, as it was important for Augustine to establish that the church in England be separate from the church in Gaul and moreover that the British Church be integrated into the Anglo-Saxon church. Gregory's answer,

Britanniarum uero omnes episcopos tuae fraternitati committis, ut
indocti doceantur, infirmi persuasione roborentur, peruersi auctoritate
corrigantur⁴³

appears to support the idea that the British be reintegrated into the Roman Church, which is consistent with Gregory's attempt to bring the 'people at the edge of the world' into the center of the Christian world. His response is

In Galliarum episcopis nullam tibi auctoritatem tribuimus, quia ab antiquis predecessorum meorum temporibus pallium Arelatensis episcopis accepit, quem nos priuare auctoritate percepta minime / debemus. Si igitur contingat ut fraternitas tua ad Galliarum prouinciam transeat, cum eodem Arelatense episcopo debet agere qualiter, siqua sunt in episcopis uitia, corrigantur⁴⁴.

Gregory's answer to this question was important to the whole of the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical world, because it clearly denoted the English Church as not only separate from the Gallic Church but also on an equal footing with it. This answer meant that even though Augustine had been consecrated in Gaul, he was not subject to the Gallic bishops, nor they to them, which, in turn, indicated that the English Church began on the same footing as the rest of the Roman Church, rather

42 Bede, *HE*, I.27 p. 86-7. 'How ought we to deal with the bishops of Gaul and Britain?'

43 Bede, *HE*, I.27 p. 88-9. 'We commit to you, my brother, all the bishops of Britain that the unlearned may be instructed, the weak strengthened by your counsel, and the perverse corrected by your authority'.

44 Bede, *HE*, I.27 p. 86-7. 'We give you no authority over the bishops of Gaul because the bishop of Arles received the pallium long ago in the days of my predecessors and we must on no account deprive him of the authority he has received. So, my brother, if you chance to cross over to the province of Gaul, you must consult with the bishop of Arles as to how such faults as are found among the bishops may be amended'.

than being subject to a regional Church. This was potential concern for Anglo-Saxon clerics, due to Gregory the Great's efforts to 'Involve the Frankish Church in the English mission'⁴⁵, though this was primarily in a support role. Thus, through Augustine's mission, Gregory created a direct link from Rome, and the pope, to the Anglo-Saxon Church, which is part of why Anglo-Saxon authors referred to Gregory the Great as 'our apostle'. It also meant that, while there were competing Churches (Anglo-Saxon, British, and Irish) in Britain, only the one established by the Roman mission had papal backing and thus, the more direct connection to Rome and St. Peter. Not only was Question VII, and the *Libellus* as a whole, important to Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics in terms of the answers that Augustine received, but it was also fundamental in establishing the tradition of going to the pope, either in person or by letter, for answers and arbitration of disputes.

Reliance on papal authority for the resolution of Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastic disputes is further demonstrated in the *Vita Wilfridi*. In his *Vita*, Wilfrid is described as going to the pope in order to resolve disputes that he had with several ecclesiastical figures in Britain. The first of these was when he had been stripped of his bishopric at York in favor of Chad. Due to Wilfrid's absence, King Oswiu had given Wilfrid's bishopric to Chad, an Irish ecclesiastic.

Quodam igitur tempore, adhuc sanct Wilfritho episcopo trans mare non veniente, Oswi rex, male suadente invidia, hostis antiqui instinctu alium praearripere inordinate sedem suam edoctus consensit ab his, qui quartamdecimanam partem contra apostolicae sedis regulam sibi elegerunt; ordinantes servum Dei religiosissimum et admirabilem doctorem, de Hibernia insula venientem, nomine Ceadda, adhuc eo ignorante, in sedem episcopalem Eboracae civitatis indocte contra canones constituerunt.⁴⁶

In response to this, Wilfrid went to Rome to petition the pope to give him his bishopric back, which the pope did at a synod at Rome. When Wilfrid returned with Theodore to York, Archbishop Theodore required Chad to step down in favor of Wilfrid.

⁴⁵ Ian Wood, 'The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury To the English', in *Speculum* 69 (1994), p. 5.

⁴⁶ Stephen of Ripon, *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, Edited and translated by Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: 1927), Ch. XIV, p. 31. 'After a lapse of time, when Saint Wilfrid the bishop did not arrive from across the sea, King Oswiu, moved by envy and at the instigation of the ancient foe, consented to allow another to forestall him in his see in an irregular manner; for he was instructed by those who adhered to the Quartodeciman party in opposition to the rule of the Apostolic See; they consecrated to the See of York a deeply pious servant of God and admirable teacher named Chad, who cam from Ireland, but they did it ignorantly and in defiance of canon law'.

Ille vero servus Dei verus et mitissimus tunc peccatum ordinandi a quattuordecimannis in sedem alterius plene intelligens, poenitentia humili secundum iudicium episcoporum confessus, emendavit et cum consensu eius in propriam sedem Eboracae civitatis sanctum Wilfrithum episcopum constituit.⁴⁷

This is only a single example of the reliance that Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics had on papal authority but, it is, perhaps, the most important, because it describes in detail the process by which Wilfrid regained his see.

The construction of the pope as the ultimate arbiter of ecclesiastical issues within Anglo-Saxon England had two major aspects. First, it established a reliance on Rome, the actual impact of which was to weaken the hierarchy within England itself. That is, if a bishop, such as Wilfrid, could go to the pope, bypassing his archbishop, to have an issue resolved, it created a greater awareness of Rome's authority via more reliance on the pope for the resolution of local matters. This type of dependence is something that was unique to the Anglo-Saxon worldview. The second aspect of this construction is that it served to actually bolster papal power, which in turn forced more reliance. By constructing the pope as the ultimate arbiter in ecclesiastical disputes, the Anglo-Saxons reinforced their perception that Rome, and, in particular, the pope, was the center of their ecclesio-political world.

Conversion From Rome

The actual process of the conversion, as well as the methodology behind the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons was influential in forcing the new Anglo-Saxon clergy to dramatically reassess their position in the world. In addition, this process established Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical peripherality in regard to the perceived center of their spiritual world, that is, Rome. There are two fundamental facets of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons that will be discussed here. The first is

⁴⁷ Stephen of Ripon, *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, Ch. XV, p. 33. 'Chad being a true and meek servant of God and fully understanding then the wrongdoing implied in his ordination to another's see by the Quartodecimans, with humble penance confessed his fault in accordance with the decision of the bishops: whereupon Theodore, with Chad's consent, installed St Wilfrid as bishop in his own see of York'.

that the Anglo-Saxons had, according to Anglo-Saxon sources, not been converted by the native British.⁴⁸ This is contrary to many of the Continental barbarian peoples, for example, the Franks were converted by the people that they had conquered. Second, the need to fulfill the prophecy laid out in the New Testament, primarily Matt 24:14, which indicated that the world would end when the whole world had been converted would have motivated the missionaries in their efforts.

Anglo-Saxon authors routinely castigated the British for not attempting to convert the Anglo-Saxons, and indeed Bede includes this among the crimes that Gildas argues caused the Anglo-Saxons to come to Britain.⁴⁹

Qui inter alia inenarrabilium scelerum facta, quae historicus eorum
Gildas flebili sermone describit, et hoc addebant, ut numquam genti
Saxonum siue Anglorum, secum Britanniam incolenti, uerbum fidei
praedicando committerent.⁵⁰

Bede's use of Gildas here indicates two things: first, that he was conversant with the historical tradition within Britain, as will be discussed in more depth below, and second, that Bede associates the failure of the British to convert the Anglo-Saxons with Gildas. It also associates the perceived crime, the failure to preach to the Anglo-Saxons, with Gildas, which demonstrates that Bede had access to Gildas's writings, as well as implying that the British knowingly did not attempt to convert the Anglo-Saxons. However, as Meens argues, some of the questions in the *Libellus Responsionum* suggest that Augustine was dealing with a mix of Christians and pagans in Kent, rather than, as Bede presents, a purely pagan people.⁵¹ This means that not only did Bede leave out information about the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, but also that the Anglo-Saxons would already have been somewhat conversant with Christian ideas and imagery. This, in turn, meant that Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics, whether converted by British, Roman, or Irish missionaries made a decision to create

48 Bede, *HE*, I.22, p. 69.

49 Gildas, a sub-Roman British author of the fifth century, described the coming of the Anglo-Saxons as punishment from God for the sins of the British. He will be discussed in greater detail below.

50 Bede, *HE*, I.22, p. 68. 'To other unspeakable crimes, which Gildas their own historian describes in doleful words, was added this crime, that they never preached the faith to the Saxons or Angles who inhabited Britain with them'.

51 Rob Meens, "Questioning Ritual Purity The Influence of Gregory the Great's Answers to Augustine's Queries about Childbirth, Menstruation, and Sexuality", in *St Augustine and the Conversion of England* ed. by Richard Gameson (Thrupp: 1999), pp. 174-187

Rome as the center of their ecclesiastical world.

Bede's picture of the conversion, as he presents it, stands apart from similar situations on the Continent, for example, the Franks, who had been converted by the Gauls that they had conquered and the Spanish Suevi, who had been Arian Christians, but were either converted by St. Martin of Braga, with the assistance of relics of St. Martin of Tours or by a synod held at the order of King Ariamir.⁵² Gregory of Tours writes that Clovis's wife, Clotild, called Remigius, the Gallo-Roman bishop of Reims, who 'began to instill into him [Clovis] faith in the true God, Maker of heaven and earth, and urged him to forsake his idols'.⁵³ In the same chapter, the remainder of the Franks also convert, to Remigius's delight. In addition, as Ward-Perkins describes, core facets of Gallo-Roman society persisted in Frankish Gaul:

'For instance, in fifth- and sixth-century Frankish Gaul, unlike in contemporary Anglo-Saxon Britain, both administrative records and literary works continued to be written in Latin; towns and a town-based Church persisted; and even the secular administration remained urban for at least a century'.⁵⁴

In addition, the Franks adopted the spoken language of the Gallo-Roman inhabitants, which implies much higher levels of assimilation and hybridity in Gaul than were occurring in Anglo-Saxon England, as Bede presents it. However, as in Meens above, this does not seem to have not been the case. Rather, when taken in combination with Bede's discussion of the Irish involvement in the conversion of Northumbria, it appears that there was a mix of pagans, Irish Christians, and British Christians in Britain at the time that the mission arrived from Rome.

Biblical Parallels and the Fulfillment of Prophecy

Biblical passages form a fundamental aspect of both the mission to the Anglo-Saxons and as a method for Anglo-Saxon authors to fit themselves into a wider Biblically influenced history. For

52 For more on the conversion of the Suevi, see E.A. Thompson, 'The Conversion of the Spanish Suevi to Catholicism' in *Visigothic Spain: New Approaches*, edited by Edward James (Oxford: 1980), pp. 77-93.

53 Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, Translated by O.M. Dalton (Oxford: 1927), II.22(31), p. 69.

54 Bryan Ward-Perkins, 'Why did the Anglo-Saxons not Become More British?', in *The English Historical Review* 115 (2000), pp. 513-533 at p. 517.

example, Bede draws parallels between the Anglo-Saxons and the Israelites of the Old Testament.

As Scott DeGregorio argues,

The story of a chosen people's divinely inspired journey to a land where they are to build the house of God, a people supported by righteous kings and hindered by wicked ones, a people who relapse into sin but who are set straight by their teachers and in the end are reconstituted as the people of God—all this echoes the narrative Bede constructs about his own gens in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.⁵⁵

This type of comparison demonstrates that Bede was actively seeking Biblical comparisons for the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical situation. By looking to the Bible for comparisons to the Anglo-Saxon's situation, Bede was reaching into a wider Christian tradition of looking for comparisons between Biblical events and figures with those of the contemporary world.⁵⁶ Patristic and early medieval authors, in addition to seeking these typologies, also sought prophetic passages that would reflect on their situation, or provide motivation.

Matthew 24:14, 'Et praedicabitur hoc evangelium regni in universo orbe in testimonium omnibus gentibus et tunc veniet consummatio'⁵⁷ and Rom. 10:18 'Sed dico numquid non audierunt et quidem in omnem terram exiit sonus eorum et in fines orbem terrae verba eorum.'⁵⁸ were two of the primary scriptures that were used by early medieval missionaries as motivation for converting peoples on the edges of the world. The way that these passages were interpreted was that those who were being converted by the sixth century were in the 'third part of the world', as described by Isidore of Seville and Paulus Orosius.⁵⁹ From Bede's use of isolation and peripherality in his writings, it appears that he did not look on it as a negative, save in regard to the distance, both physical and spiritual, from Rome, rather it was merely the state of affairs in Anglo-Saxon England.

55 Scott DeGregorio, 'Bede's *In Ezram et Neemiam* and the Reform of the Northumbrian Church', in *Speculum* 79 (2004), p. 5.

56 For a description of typologies see: Rodney Edgecombe, 'Typology and After: A Taxonomy of Variants', in *Religion & Literature*, Vol. 27 (1995), pp. 5-26.

57 Matt. 24:14 Translation: 'And this gospel of the kingdom, shall be preached in the whole world, for a testimony to all nations, and then shall the consummation come.' From (Douay-Rheims).

58 Rom. 10:18 Translation: 'But I say: Have they not heard? Yes, verily, their sound hath gone forth into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the whole world.' From (Douay-Rheims).

59 Each of these authors describes a three-part world. The islands of the Ocean are a portion of the third part of the world in both of these authors' works. See Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, XIV.ii.1 and Paulus Orosius, *HAP*, I.2, p. 36.

The second point that these passages make is that it is not until the whole world had been converted that the end of the world would come. The millennial nature of geographic and historical writing is reflected in Bede's *De Temporum Ratione*. From this, it is apparent that Anglo-Saxon peripherality was used by Bede as an indicator of Anglo-Saxon isolation, true, but also as an indicator that Anglo-Saxon clerics were doing their part in bringing about the end of the world in making sure that their island was not only Christian, but Roman Christian.

Aftereffects of the Conversion

Perhaps the most immediate impact of the conversion on Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical identity was caused by the re-importation of Latin. This study will focus on the effect that Classical geography had on forming an Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical sense of peripherality and on the connections to early Christianity that Latin enabled.⁶⁰ The role that these played in the construction of the Anglo-Saxon spiritual landscape cannot be overstated; Latin itself was the vehicle both for awareness of peripherality and for establishing connections to Rome, and therefore must be examined in some detail before moving on.

As mentioned above, Classical geography played a significant role in the construction of Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastic identity. This is convincingly demonstrated by Bede in the introduction of the *HE*, where he wrote that

Brittania Oceani insula, cui quondem Albion nomen fuit, inter septentrionem et occidentem locata est, Germaniae Galliae Hispaniae, maximis Europae partibus, multo intervallo adversa⁶¹.

Bede's description of Britain's location serves two purposes here, one of which will be discussed in further depth below. The second is that Bede is clearly referring to Classical geographic descriptions of Britain. It has been argued,⁶² that Bede is directly using Pliny the Elder's description of Britain

60 For a discussion of Classical and Patristic geography, see Evelyn Edson, *Mapping Time and Space How Medieval Mapmakers Viewed Their World*, (London: 1997) and A.H. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*.

61 Bede, *HE*, I.1 p. 9. 'Britain, once called Albion, is an island of the ocean and lies to the north-west, being opposite Germany, Gaul, and Spain, which form the greater part of Europe, though at a considerable distance from them.'

62 Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, p. 255.

from his *Naturalis Historia*.

Opposite to this coast is the island called Britannia, so celebrated in the records of Greece and of our own country. It is situate to the north-west, and, with a large tract of intervening sea, lies opposite to Germany, Gaul, and Spain, by far the greater part of Europe. Its former name was Albion; but at a later period, all the islands, of which we shall just now briefly make mention, were included under the name of "Britanniae". This island is distant from Gesoriacum, on the coast of the nation of the Morini, at the spot where the passage across is the shortest, fifty miles⁶³.

The passage from the *HE* serves a dual purpose within this context; first, it illustrates Bede's awareness of Britain's isolation. However, more pertinent here, by describing Britain as lying to the northwest, rather than the Continent being southeast of Britain, Bede clearly demonstrates his knowledge and acceptance of the Classical model of world geography. His use of Classical geography illustrates the impact that Classical authors and ideas had on Anglo-Saxon authors.

Classical authors had a huge impact on the way that these authors described their world.

From reconstructions of Anglo-Saxon libraries,⁶⁴ it is possible to determine, at least for some Anglo-Saxon authors, which Classical and Patristic authors were available to Anglo-Saxon authors. Part of the way that this is done is by reconstituting which Classical and Patristic texts were known to Anglo-Saxon authors from citations and references within their texts. From these reconstructions it is possible to determine that many Classical and Patristic authors were known in monasteries across Anglo-Saxon England. In addition, it is possible to reconstruct some of the texts that were known in Anglo-Saxon libraries from the few library catalogs that still exist from these monasteries. Based on this evidence, I have chosen Classical and Patristic authors of histories that appear in many Anglo-Saxon texts. Among these authors are Paulus Orosius,⁶⁵ Isidore of Seville, Pliny the Elder,⁶⁶ and, from the Patristic world, Gildas. Understanding these authors' worldviews and their perceptions of places', particularly Britain's, relative locations in the world allows greater understanding of how

63 Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. John Bostock (London: Bohn 1845), p. 350.

64 Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, (Oxford: 2006).

65 'Paulus Orosius', in *OCCL*, edited by M.C. Howatson (Oxford: 1997), p. 399.

66 'Pliny the Elder', in *OCCL*, p. 445.

they influenced Anglo-Saxon perceptions of their place in the world. To that end, we will begin by examining their constructions of world geography.

Paulus Orosius

Paulus Orosius (c.375 – 418?) was originally from the north-western portion of the Iberian peninsula, but fled to St. Augustine when the Goths invaded Spain⁶⁷. He wrote the *Historiarum Adversus Paganos Libri Septem* in the early part of the fifth century at the suggestion of Augustine; Orosius's stated purpose in writing the *Historiarum Adversus Paganos* was 'as a response to those who blamed the sack of Rome on the Christians for undermining traditional Roman values'⁶⁸. Orosius had a view of Britain as existing at the very edge of the world.

In his *Historiarum Adversus Paganos*, Orosius described Britain's location thus:

Britannia oceani insula per longum in boream extenditur; a meridie Gallias habet. Cuius proximum litus transmeantibus ciuitas aperit, quae Rutupi portus; unde haud procul a Morinis in austro positos Menapos Batausque prospectat. Haec insula habet in longo milia passum DCCC, in lato millia CC⁶⁹.

Orosius's description of Britain emphasizes its isolation in the simple mention of it as an island of the Ocean. As described above, by locating Britain in the Ocean, or *Oceanus*, rather than in one of the many seas known to Classical authors, Orosius creates an image of Britain that is of a fundamentally isolated place. In addition to this basic description, he discusses Britain somewhat while describing Gallia Belgica, writing that 'a circio oceanum Brittanicum, a septentrione Brittanium insulam'⁷⁰. This description of Britain is more substantial than several other authors, one of whom was Pliny the Elder, and Orosius even mentions several events that took place in Britain,

67 'Paulus Orosius', in *OCCL*, p. 399.

68 Edson, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, p. 31.

69 Orosius, *HAP*, I.2 p. 28-9. 'Britain is an island in the Ocean that extends far to the north; to its south it has Gaul. On the closest shore to which one can cross, there is a city called the Port of Rutupus which looks across to the land of the Menapians and the Batavians, who lie at no great distance from the Morini to their south. The island is 800 miles long and 200 miles wide.' Translation by A.T. Fear, *Orosius Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, (Liverpool: 2010), p. 45.

70 Orosius, *HAP*, I.2 p. 28. 'On the northwest [of Gallia Belgica], the Britannic Ocean; on the north the island of Britain' in Paulus Orosius, *Historiarum Adversus Paganos Libri Septem*, trans. By Roy J. Deferrari (Washington D.C.: 1964), 14.

such as Constantine's elevation to Roman Emperor, however, he presents this merely as an aftereffect of Augustus Constantius's death.⁷¹ Thus, Orosius's description of the island, as above, emphasizes Britain's isolation from the Continent through its location in *Oceanus*. This type of description, that is, constructing Britain's isolation through its association with *Oceanus*, informed later authors' own depictions of Britain's isolation.

Isidore of Seville

Isidore of Seville (c.560 - 636) wrote the *Etymologiae* in Seville in the later part of his life at the request of Braulio, bishop of Saragossa.⁷² It was intended to be a comprehensive collection of knowledge and thus, Isidore wrote a section on geography in addition to sections on grammar, rhetoric, logic, geometry, theology, and other subjects. Encyclopedic knowledge was important to Isidore, given that he believed words themselves to be conveyors of information, and that by looking at a word's etymology, one could understand its meaning. An example of this, discussed in more detail below, is when Isidore writes that some people believe the Britons to be stupid, because the word 'Briton' is traceable, according to Isidore, to the Latin *brutus*, meaning dull or stupid.⁷³ This understanding of the way words work influenced all of Isidore's writings, but is primarily clear in the *Etymologiae*, and his depiction of Britain and its inhabitants, clearly demonstrates his belief about words and also his picture of Britain.

Isidore's description of Britain in the *Etymologiae* begins with:

Brittania Oceani insula interfuso mari toto orbe divisa, a vocabulo
suae gentis cognominata.⁷⁴

His description of Britain being 'completely separated from the circle of lands by the sea' illustrates

⁷¹ Orosius, *HAP*, VII.XXV.16 p. 363.

⁷² For more discussion on Isidore of Seville see: John Henderson, *The Medieval World of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: 2007).

⁷³ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, edited by W.M. Lindsay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957) IX.ii.102. Translations of Isidore are from: Stephen A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, Oliver Berghof, and Muriel Hall, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, (Cambridge: 2006).

⁷⁴ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, Book XIV.vi.2 'Britannia is an island of the Ocean, cut off from the whole globe by the intervening sea; it takes its name from the name of its inhabitants'.

the perception, common among Classical and Late Antique authors, of Britain as far removed from the rest of the world. His description continues by more specifically locating Britain in relation to other known places.

Haec adversa Galliarum parte ad prospectum Hispaniae sita est;
circuitus eius quadragies octies septuaginta quinque milia; multa et
magna flumina in ea, fontes calidi, metallorum larga et varia copia:
gagates lapis ibi plurimus et margaritae⁷⁵.

This is very similar to Orosius's earlier portrayal. When writing about the people of Britain, Isidore again emphasizes the distance to Britain. He writes that

Brittones quidam Latine nominatos suspicantur, eo quod bruti sint,
gens intra Oceanum interfuso mari quasi extra orbem posita. De
quibus Vergilius (Ecl. I, 67)⁷⁶: Toto divisos orbe Britannos.⁷⁷

Thus, *Briton* is derived from *bruti*, giving his reader information about the people of the region, through his system of etymologically derived knowledge. However, the part of this citation that is most useful to this study is that Britain was 'separated by the sea' from the rest of the world. This clearly reinforces the point that to these authors, Britain was completely cut off by *Oceanus* from the Continent, which made it remote and isolated. This section of the *Etymologiae* establishes two clear facets of Britain's isolation; first, separation based on *Oceanus*, as Isidore writes "⁷⁸ the second, that the 'circle of lands' is the known world and everything beyond it including Britain, is an unknown, distant place. It is perhaps surprising that insular authors reflected these Classical and Patristic views of their homeland; however, as will be shown below, their understanding of the world came from these same sources, which necessarily informed their perceptions of their place in

75 Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, XIV.vi.2 'It is situated opposite the region of Gaul, looking towards Spain; Its circumference is 24,000 (Roman) miles. There are many great rivers there, hot springs, a great and varied abundance of metals: it is rich in jet and pearls'.

76 The passage in Virgil's *Eclogues* that Isidore refers to is: 'At nos hinc alii sitientis ibimus Afros, pars Scythiam et rapidum cretae veniemus Oaxen et penitus toto divisos orbe Britanos'. Virgil, *Eclogues*, edited and translated by H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1999), Eclogue 1, p. 28. 'But we must go hence—some to the thirsty Africans, some to reach Scythia and the chalk-rolling Oaxes, and the Britons, wholly sundered from all the world'.

77 Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, IX.ii.102. 'Some suspect that the Britons were so named in Latin because they are brutes (brutus). Their nation is situated within the Ocean, with the sea flowing between us and them, as if they were outside our orbit'.

78 A discussion of the implications of placing Britain in *Oceanus*, rather than one of the myriad seas known to Classical authors is in Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Living in the Ocean', in *Studies in the Cult of Saint Columba*, edited by Cormac Bourke (Dublin: 1997), pp. 11-24.

the world.

Gildas

Unlike the previous texts, *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* was written in Britain. Gildas (c.500 – c.570) was writing in the wake of the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons and was certainly conscious of the Classical geographical construction that the Continent was 'here' and that the islands of *Oceanus*, including Britain, were 'there', which is demonstrated several times throughout the work, especially in his introduction which will be described in depth below. *De Excidio* established a model which many later insular authors used in their own works, and functions as a bridge between the Mediterranean centered Classical and Patristic world and early medieval Anglo-Saxon England. However, some controversy surrounds Gildas's writings as it is impossible to establish an exact date or location for his works, which necessitates caution when working with them. As Dumville laments: 'We do not know what kind of calendar Gildas followed. We do not know whether he could have assigned any absolute dates – according to whatever era – to any of the events which he describes'⁷⁹. However, the information contained within *De Excidio* does provide some clues about Gildas's education and social class, which in turn, informs his ideas about his, as well as Britain's, place in the world.

In addition to the scant information about his writings, very little is known of Gildas the man. It is even unclear whether or not he was of the Latin speaking upper classes or the bilingual, Latin and British speaking, middle class of sub-Roman Britain. Michael Lapidge attempts to solve this question in 'Gildas's Education and the Latin Culture of Sub-Roman Britain' where he argues that Gildas's use of the Latin language demonstrates the same fluency of language that characterized writers who were native Latin speakers, rather than those who relied on glossaries for obscure words⁸⁰ such as Aldhelm. According to Lapidge, 'Gildas's writings furnish suggestive evidence that

79 David Dumville, 'The Chronology of *De Excidio Britanniae*, Book 1', in *Gildas: New Approaches*, edited by Michael Lapidge and David Dumville (Woodbridge, 1984), pp. 51-61 at p. 61.

80 Michael Lapidge, 'Gildas's Education and the Latin Culture of Sub-Roman Britain', in *Gildas: New Approaches*

he received a rhetorical training in the traditional Roman manner,⁸¹ and he also attempts to discover whether Gildas had continued his education at the hands of a *rhetor*, arguing that 'it is not only the structure of *De Excidio Britanniae* which reveals Gildas's debt to rhetorical training; the entire conception and style of the work is rhetorical'⁸². Based on these characteristics, Lapidge believes that Gildas had most likely received a Classical education, writing that

it is time to relinquish the opinion... that Gildas was the product of a monastic education of the sort received by Aldhelm, whose works Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae* has been thought to resemble. On the contrary, Gildas's writings furnish suggestive evidence that he received a rhetorical training in the traditional Roman manner⁸³.

Lapidge's conclusions are significant for this study for several reasons, but primarily because it can be inferred that this education formed his perception of geography, and that his sense of Britain's place in the world was determined to a larger extent by a Classical Roman perspective.

De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae forms the only means to investigate whether or not Gildas used similar or the same tools and ideas that the previously discussed authors did, as it is the only work by him that survives to the present. *De Excidio*'s main purpose was to be a homily against the sins of the sub-Roman British, who, Gildas claims, brought the invasion of the Anglo-Saxons on themselves by their sins. However, the most useful section of *De Excidio* for this study is a part of the geographical introduction. This is the portion that will be examined here, because it emphasizes the isolation of Britain.

Brittania insula in extremo ferme orbis limite circium occidentemque versus divina, ut dicitur, statera terrae totius ponderatrice librata ab Africo boreali propensius tensa axi, octingentorum in longo milium, ducentorum in lato spatium, exceptis diversorum prolixioribus promontorium tractibus, quae arcuatis oceani sinibus ambiuntur, tenens, cuius diffusiore et, ut ita dicam, intransmeabili undique circulo absque meridiane freto plagae, quo ad Galliam Belgicam navigatur⁸⁴.

edited by Michael Lapidge and David Dumville (Woodbridge: 1984), pp. 27-51 at p. 37

81 Lapidge, 'Gildas's Education', p. 40.

82 Lapidge, 'Gildas's Education', p. 44.

83 Lapidge, 'Gildas's Education', p. 47.

84 Gildas, *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, edited and trans. by Michael Winterbottom (London: Phillimore, 1978), III.1 pp. 89-90. 'The island of Britain lies virtually at the end of the world, towards the west and north-west. Poised in the divine scales that (we are told) weigh the whole earth, it stretches from the south-west towards the

Gildas emphasizes the remoteness and isolation of Britain by describing the ocean as '*intransmeabili undique circulo absque meridiane freto plagae*'. He reiterates the isolation of Britain when discussing the conversion of the British after his discussion of the arrival of the Romans.

Interea glaciali frigore rigenti insulae et velut longiore terrarum
secessu soli visibili non proximae...⁸⁵.

These discussions of Britain's remoteness demonstrate a knowledge of Roman geographical traditions. By referring to Britain as an island in *Oceanus*, Gildas illustrates his awareness of Classical traditions.

That Gildas knew of older sources such as Orosius and Eusebius can also be inferred through his education, which, as above, most probably followed the Classical model.⁸⁶ N. Wright argues in his chapter 'Gildas's Geographical Perspective: Some Problems' in *Gildas: New Approaches*, that the words that Gildas uses to describe Britain emphasize his geographical awareness.

Throughout the account Britain is variously referred to as *Britannia*, *insula*, or *patria*. Indeed, Gildas's frequent personification of *Britannia* is indicative of his attitude to his *patria* as a single entity... In short Gildas's view of British history is one of *Britannia* – *Britannia insula*⁸⁷.

Despite his idealization of Britain as a single *patria*, Gildas demonstrates his awareness, as in the above citations, of Britain's peripherality. As a result of his image of Britain as a single Roman *patria*, the failure of Rome to maintain its imperial responsibilities and, in fact, its withdrawal from Britain in the wake of problems close to the center of the Roman world left Britain abandoned, in Gildas's mind, and in a peripheral state with regard to the civilized world. In fact, it appears that

northern pole. It has a length of eight hundred miles, a width of two hundred: leaving out of account the various large headlands that jut out between the curving ocean bays. It is fortified on all sides by a vast and more or less uncrossable ring of sea, apart from the straits on the south where one can cross to Belgic Gaul'.

85 Gildas, *De Excidio*, III.8 p. 91. 'Meanwhile, to an island numb with chill ice and far removed, as in a remote nook of the world, from the visible sun...' p. 18.

86 Gildas's knowledge of Paulus Orosius's *HAP* is demonstrated below in a comparison of the descriptions of Britain contained in *De Excidio*, the *HAP*, the *HE*, and Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia*. Gildas uses very similar language to both Pliny and Paulus Orosius, which suggests that he knew the texts. That Gildas knew of the *HAP* is discussed in Neil Wright, 'Did Gildas Read Orosius?', in *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 9 (1985).

87 N. Wright, 'Gildas's geographical perspective: some problems', in *Gildas: New Approaches*, eds. M. Lapidge and D. Dumville (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1984), pp. 61-85 at p. 102.

Gildas was decrying the isolation and ensuing peripherality that occurred when the Romans abandoned Britain, given that they effectively destroyed the Mediterranean centered *patria* that Gildas clearly saw as civilization. His implication of Britain's isolation from the Roman center does not necessarily imply that the *patria* evaporated as soon as the Romans withdrew, given that the physical aspects of this *patria*, that is the roads and buildings, remained. However, the distance and ensuing lack of communication, especially the missive that the sub-Roman British received from Rome telling them that they were on their own, brought immediate isolation and awareness of sudden peripherality to the sub-Roman British. If it is true that Gildas considered Roman Britain to be a single *patria*, and that 'ita ut non Britannia, sed Romania censeretur'⁸⁸, then the Roman withdrawal effectively severed the link to Rome, which was only later re-established by Gregory the Great's mission to England. Thus, in *De Excidio*, Gildas demonstrated an awareness of Britain's distance from the perceived center of his world which was Rome and this awareness was appropriated by many later Insular authors, both Anglo-Saxons like Bede, and British authors such as Nennius.

The isolation and peripherality discussed here serves a very specific purpose in *De Excidio Britanniae*. Much like Bede did later, Gildas first described Britain immediately after his preface, wherein he locates Britain 'virtually at the end of the world', giving the reader a picture of Britain's location in the world, that also necessarily emphasizes its isolation. Then, he gives a brief history of the Romans in Britain, bracketing this history with another mention of Britain as 'far removed, as in a remote nook of the world', which serves to equate connection to the Romans with centrality. The second function that this section of *De Excidio* serves is to highlight Gildas's Mediterranean focus, based on his education and this bracketed section, Gildas necessarily associates peripherality with a non-Roman state of existence. Indeed for Gildas, *Romanitas* was directly equivalent to civilization and the center, and thus a world without Rome's presence was one of peripherality, isolation, and disconnect from the charismatic center of the world. By bracketing his discussion of Britain's brief

⁸⁸ Gildas, *De Excidio*, III.7 p. 91. 'the island should be rated not as Britannia but as Romania.' p. 18.

connection to Rome with an account of Roman-less Britain as supremely isolated, Gildas reinforces the perception that 'non Britannia, sed Romania censeretur'⁸⁹ and, therefore, that without the presence of Rome, Britain had been returned to isolation and peripherality.

These Classical and Patristic texts provide an overview of the type of geography available in Anglo-Saxons libraries and their primary unifying feature is their handling of Britain, which, as has been demonstrated above, is to place it at the very edge of the known world. Even the Insular author, Gildas, having placed Rome at the center of his world, describes Britain as existing in the frozen north, separated from what he considered to be civilization. That this understanding had a profound effect on Anglo-Saxon monks who were writing about their own place in the world cannot be doubted, and their extraordinary tendency to adopt Classical geographical conventions with respect to their position in the world only further demonstrates their reliance on Rome for self-definition. Having accepted the Classical view that Britain lay at the far northern edge of the world, and was, as Virgil wrote, 'wholly sundered from the world', Anglo-Saxon authors necessarily reinforced the understanding that they were an isolated, peripheral people.

Bede

Bede provides much of the evidence for understanding Anglo-Saxon authors' sense of peripherality and awareness of isolation from Rome. From the citations in his text, it becomes apparent that Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia*, Paulus Orosius's *Historiae Adversum Paganos*, and Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* were all known at Jarrow in the time of Bede. As Howe argues

[Bede's] sense of living on a distant and isolated island came from having read Roman geographers, especially Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History*, who told him that he lived on a distant and isolated island. This Roman geographical tradition reached Bede through various Christian intermediaries, most notably Isidore of Seville and Gildas.⁹⁰

Thus, part of the reason for choosing these Classical and Patristic sources.

⁸⁹ Gildas, *De Excidio*, III.7 p. 91. Translation: 'the island should be rated not as Britannia but as Romania'

⁹⁰ Nicholas Howe, 'Rome: Capitol of Anglo-Saxon England', p. 150.

Bede presents an intriguing picture of the conversion, as he gives three accounts of the history of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, *De Temporum Ratione*, and in *De Temporibus*. This study, however, will focus on the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and *De Temporum Ratione*, because *De Temporum Ratione* gives an expanded version of the account in *De Temporibus*. Bede's account of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons in *De Temporum Ratione* is much more rudimentary than that in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*; there, Bede simply writes that Gregory sent Augustine and others to Britain and 'Aethelberht was soon converted to the grace of Christ, together with the people of the Cantuarii over whom he ruled, and those of the neighboring kingdoms'⁹¹. Bede did note, however, that those who lived north of the Humber 'did not at this time hear the Word of life'⁹². It is not until later that he described the conversion of the Northumbrians.

Edwin, the most excellent king of the English living across the Humber in north Britain, received with his people the Word of salvation through the preaching of Bishop Paulinus⁹³.

This account of the conversion can be viewed as evidence that Bede did not have access to the materials that he used to describe the conversion in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* when he was writing *De Temporum Ratione*, however, some of the brevity in *De Temporum Ratione* comes from its nature as a chronicle, rather than a history.⁹⁴ The version of the conversion of Northumbria in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is much fuller; after explaining the circumstances that led up to Edwin's conversion, Bede writes

Igitur accepit rex Eduini cum cunctis gentis suae nobilibus ac plebe perplurima fidem et lauacrum sanctae regenerationis anno regni sui undecimo, qui est annus dominicae incarnationis DCXXVII, ab aduentu uero / Anglorum in Brittaniam annus circiter CLXXXmus. Baptizatus est autem Eburaci die sancto paschae pridie iduum Aprilium, in ecclesia sancti Petri apostoli, quam ibidem ipse de ligno, cum cathecizaretur atque ad percipiendum baptismum inbueretur, citato opere construxit.⁹⁵

91 Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, translated by Faith Wallis (Liverpool: 1999), year 4557 p. 226.

92 Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, year 4557, p. 226.

93 Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, year 4591, p. 228.

94 This is illustrated in Bede's preface to the *HE*. Bede, *HE*, Preface, pp. 4-5.

95 Bede, *HE*, II.14 p. 186. 'King Edwin, with all the nobles of his race and a vast number of the common people, received the faith and regeneration by holy baptism in the eleventh year of his reign, that is in the year of our Lord 627 and about 180 years after the coming of the English to Britain. He was baptized at York on Easter Day, 12 April,

The account in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is much fuller and comes with more detail than the version that Bede provides in *De Temporum Ratione*. However, this is primarily due to stylistic differences between a chronicle and a history. It is also due, in part, to the fact that Bede had access to more source material when writing his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, as discussed earlier. As R.A.

Markus argues,

The purpose of a chronicle, as Bede well knew, was to survey the 'sequence of the times': that is to say, to map out the ages of the world from the Creation, placing the major landmarks against the backdrop of the divine plan of salvation⁹⁶.

Markus reiterates Bede's knowledge of Isidore of Seville's works and at the same time expands on Bede's use of the chronicle format. He writes that Bede

was perfectly clear, as no student of Isidore's *Etymologies* could fail to be clear, about the fundamental difference in purpose between chronicle and history. The former belonged to his work as a teacher of 'technical' subjects; the latter to his work as a teacher of morals... His history certainly profited from the chronological studies and the reflection that went into the making of the chronicles, but it remained as distinct from them in form and in purpose as Eusebius's History had been from his Chronicle⁹⁷.

Thus, the chronicle in *De Temporum Ratione* and the history in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* are not only different in form, but also in function. Whereas *De Temporum Ratione* was to be a chronicle of world history and intended to provide a biblical explanation of world history, that is describing the six ages of the world and constructing an apocalyptic framework for world history, the *Historia Ecclesiastica* was, broadly speaking, intended to be a history of the Church in England, and in particular the Northumbrian Church.

The description of the conversion in *De Temporum Ratione* is a series of entries in a chronicle rather than being the focus of the early part of a book, as in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

In his description of the conversion, Bede cites the *Liber Pontificalis*, and specifically the biography

in the church of St. Peter the Apostle, which he had hastily built of wood while he was a catechumen and under instruction before he received baptism'.

96 R.A. Markus, 'Bede and the Tradition of Ecclesiastical Historiography', Jarrow Lecture 1975, p. 6.

97 R.A. Markus, 'Bede and the Tradition of Ecclesiastical Historiography', p. 6.

of Gregory the Great for its description of the conversion of the English. The *Liber Pontificalis* has this to say about the conversion

Then the holy Gregory sent God's servants Mellitus, Augustine, John, and many other god fearing monks with them, to preach to the English nation and convert them to the Lord Jesus Christ⁹⁸.

These sketches of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons were filled in in much more detail in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, written six years after *De Temporum Ratione*.

The opening passage of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* clearly demonstrates the acute awareness of isolation and existence on the periphery. The very first sentence highlights Bede's acknowledgement that Britain was a peripheral locale:

Brittania Oceani insula, cui quondam Albion nomen fuit, inter septentrionem et occidentem locata est, Germaniae Galliae Hispaniae, maximis Europae partibus, multo interuallo adversa⁹⁹.

As Nicholas Howe argues, beginning a work on the history of one's own people by highlighting how removed and remote they were from the rest of Europe clearly shows how Bede imagined and constructed that Britain existed on the periphery. He presents this in 'Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England'.

Bede looks at his homeland not as the center of the world, as is so often the case with nationalist or protonationalist writers, but as set on the periphery of a Europe mapped from Rome.¹⁰⁰

In his book *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, A.H. Merrills argues that the terminology that Bede used at the opening of Bk I Ch. 1 is a modification of Pliny's description of Britain, who describes Britain as being

Opposite to this coast is the island called Britannia, so celebrated in the records of Greece and of our own country. It is situate to the north-west, and, with a large tract of intervening sea, lies opposite to Germany, Gaul, and Spain, by far the greater part of Europe. Its former name was Albion; but at a later period, all the islands, of which we shall just now briefly make mention, were included under

98 Anonymous, *Liber Pontificalis*, trans. Raymond Davis (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 'Gregory' p. 63.

99 Bede, *HE*, I.1 p. 9. 'Britain, once called Albion, is an island of the ocean and lies to the north-west, being opposite Germany, Gaul, and Spain, which form the greater part of Europe, though at a considerable distance from them.'

100 Nicholas Howe, 'Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England', p. 151.

the name of “Britanniae”. This island is distant from Gesoriacum, on the coast of the nation of the Morini, at the spot where the passage across is the shortest, fifty miles.¹⁰¹

This is only slightly less distant than Thule. Merrill's hypothesis is that the syntactical shift from Pliny's account in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* emphasizes Oceanus and the separation that comes with that association. Merrill argues that Bede

ensures the prominence of *Oceanus* in the very definition of Britannia. Within Classical writing, of course, the most important characteristic of *Oceanus* was its position at the circumference of the world, and Bede's syntax effectively imbues his homeland with these characteristics¹⁰².

Merrill's demonstration of *Oceanus's* role in this description of Britain indicates the extent to which Classical ideas about geography had permeated Bede's geographical imagination. However, the statement that this is simply a modification of Pliny's description of Britain neglects the wide variety of authors that Bede had access to at Wearmouth-Jarrow. His introduction to the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is indebted to many previous authors who wrote about Britain's remoteness and isolation. For example, this section owes much to Gildas's *De Excidio* and Bede's opening *Britannia Oceani insula* is also similar to Orosius's opening to his description of Britain in the *Historiae Adversum Paganos* and Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia*. To better display the similarities between these authors' descriptions of Britain, I have provided a table containing the passages in question here.

101 Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. John Bostock (London: Bohn 1845), p. 350.

102 Merrill, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, p. 255.

Table 1: Comparisons of Geographical Introductions

Author	Text
Pliny the Elder	Opposite to this coast is the island called Britannia, so celebrated in the records of Greece and of our own country. It is situate to the north-west, and, with a large tract of intervening sea, lies opposite to Germany, Gaul, and Spain, by far the greater part of Europe. Its former name was Albion; but at a later period, all the islands, of which we shall just now briefly make mention, were included under the name of “Britanniae”. This island is distant from Gesoriacum, on the coast of the nation of the Morini, at the spot where the passage across is the shortest, fifty miles ¹⁰³
Paulus Orosius	Britain is an island in the Ocean that extends far to the north; to its south it has Gaul. On the closest shore to which one can cross, there is a city called the port of Rutupus which looks across to the land of the Menapians and the Batavians, who lie at no great distance from the Morini to their south. The island is 800 miles long and 200 miles wide. ¹⁰⁴
Gildas	Brittania insula in extremo ferme orbis limite circium occidentemque versus divina, ut dicitur, statera terrae totius ponderatrice librata ab Africo boriali propensius tensa axi, octingentorum in longo milium, ducentorum in lato spatium, exceptis diversorum prolixioribus promontorium tractibus, quae arcuatis oceani sinibus ambiuntur. ¹⁰⁵
Bede	Brittania Oceani insula, cui quondam Albion nomen fuit, inter septentrionem et occidentem locata est, Germaniae Galliae Hispaniae, maximis Europae partibus, multo intervallo aduersa. Quae per milia passuum DCCC in boream longa, latitudinis habet milia CC. ¹⁰⁶

Based on the similarities here it is clear that Bede was drawing on a long geographical tradition in his description of Britain. Thus, Bede's internalization of Classical and Patristic views on Britain's remoteness illustrates that by one hundred and thirty years after the conversion books that acknowledge Britain's peripherality appear to have taken root in Anglo-Saxon monasteries.

Bede's awareness of Britain's isolation in regard to Rome permeates all of his works, from the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and *De Temporum Ratione* to his works on biblical exegesis. For example, as Merrills presents, Bede's commentary on the Song of Songs demonstrates his

103 Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. John Bostock (London: Bohn 1845), p. 350.

104 Paulus Orosius, *HAP*, I.II.76 p. 45.

105 Gildas, *De Excidio et Conquestu Brittaniae*, III.1 pp. 89-90. 'The island of Britain lies virtually at the end of the world, towards the west and north-west. Poised in the divine scales that (we are told) weigh the whole earth, it stretches from the south-west towards the northern pole. It has a length of eight hundred miles, a width of two hundred: leaving out of account the various large headlands that jut out between the curving ocean bays.'

106 Bede, *HE*, I.1 p. 15. 'Britain, once called Albion, is an island of the ocean and lies to the north-west, being opposite Germany, Gaul, and Spain, which form the greater part of Europe, though at a considerable distance from them. It extends 800 miles to the north, and is 200 miles broad.'

understanding of Britain's peripheral position in ecclesiastical geography.

Bede reveals how an acute awareness of his own physical location necessitated new readings of Scripture... 'we are unable to know about the things which grow in the first parts of the world, I mean Arabia and India, Judaea and Egypt'... The twofold nature of Britain's isolation is encapsulated here in the ambiguity of the phrase *in primis orbis partibus*¹⁰⁷.

The terminology that Bede uses here, as Merrills indicates, implies that the Eastern world has a historical and geographical precedence over his own *Oceani insula*. This does not, in itself, illustrate his understanding of peripherality, however, when one considers that the eastern world was home to the Garden of Eden and to the heartland of his civilization, then Bede's exclusion of his homeland from the first parts of the world makes his awareness of Britain's isolation from the center of the world apparent. His description of Britain's place in relation to the world highlights his appropriation of Classical and biblical geographical perspectives, both of which describe *Oceanus*, and the islands contained in it, as being remote, isolated places.

Bede's use of the isolation of Britain is similar to Gildas's, in that he places it in direct contrast to his view of civilization. Gildas opens *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* with isolation in opposition to the Roman Christian world. He uses isolation and remoteness to show Britain without Roman Christianity's presence and influence. Bede presents a similar image to Gildas, illustrating a remote and isolated island. In contrast to Gildas's depiction of Britain, however, Bede's presentation of the peripherality of Britain enabled the Anglo-Saxons, within the framework of his narrative, to be able to recover some of the ties to the imagined center of their ecclesiastical world through the process conversion and pilgrimage, among other factors already discussed. Despite the similarity of their use of isolation, that is, as a descriptor for being disconnected and remote from Rome, Bede has a different purpose in writing the *Historia Ecclesiastica*,¹⁰⁸ one interpretation of which is as a salvation narrative. Thus, the mission from Rome is seen as a return to civilization and

107 Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, p. 237.

108 For possible purposes see: Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain: From Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, (New York: 1966). also: Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, (Princeton: 1988).

centrality. By framing his work in this context, Bede reinforces the tie to Rome, however, in doing so he also reinforces the perceived peripherality of Anglo-Saxon England in his reliance on Rome as the ecclesiastical center.

Pilgrimage to Rome

Travel to Rome was an important feature of Anglo-Saxon England, as Bede indicates in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 'Quod his temporibus plures de gente Anglorum, nobiles ignobiles, laici clerici, uiri ac feminae certatim facere consuerunt'.¹⁰⁹ The primary reason for travel was pilgrimage, though some went for political, mercantile, or other reasons as well. As Stephen Matthews notes, there were three broad categories of those traveling to Rome: *peregrini*, that is those living the ascetic life in a self-imposed life long exile from their homeland, those traveling to Rome on pilgrimage, that is, those who traveled to Rome with the intention of returning home after their visit, and finally those who intended to remain in Rome until their deaths.¹¹⁰ While the Anglo-Saxons did not generally pursue lifelong exile as a form of pilgrimage, they often went on shorter pilgrimages to Rome and other holy sites.

By far the largest group, the second category includes both those who went for religious reasons, both political and for pilgrimage. There are numerous sources for travel to Rome from Anglo-Saxon England. Among the primary sources are Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and Stephen of Ripon's *Vita Wilfridi*. As an example of the amount of travel that there are sources for, Bede mentions travel to Rome in 26 different places in the *HE*. It appears from the numbers of people who went to Rome that establishing connections to Rome were important to the Anglo-Saxons on a personal level. It is unclear how many Anglo-Saxons went to Rome, given that it was in Bede's interests to present his people as pious and holy. However, as Matthews demonstrates, Bede was not

¹⁰⁹ Bede, *HE*, V.7 p. 473. 'At this time many Englishmen, nobles and commons, layfolk and clergy, men and women, were eager to do the same thing'. This refers to Caedwalla and Ine, kings who both went to Rome at the ends of their reigns.

¹¹⁰ Stephen Matthews, *The Road to Rome: Travel and Travellers Between England and Italy in the Anglo-Saxon Centuries*, BAR International Series 1680, (2007), p. 12.

greatly overstating, if at all, the number of Anglo-Saxons who traveled to Rome for religious purposes. While Matthews argues that it is impossible to tell how many Anglo-Saxons went to Rome, it is possible to see that 'after the first recorded journeys of Wilfrid, Benedict Biscop and Cadwalla... the number of people who went to Rome almost certainly increased steadily, despite political, military and climatic difficulties'.¹¹¹ Some of the pilgrims making up this group of travelers also fit into the next group.

The third group of travelers, those who went to die in Rome are some of the most interesting for the purpose of this study. Both rich and poor, kings and paupers, went to Rome for this purpose:

Cadwalla, King of Wessex (688), Cenred King of Mercia and Offa of East Anglia (709), and Ine of Wessex (726) seem to have no reason to leave their homeland save the salvation of their souls.¹¹²

However, as Matthews concludes,

From the many references to those going for the sake of prayer, one must conclude that the greater number of people who went left no individual record and we have no means of estimating their number.¹¹³

The idea that people traveled to Rome in order to die demonstrates two things. First, it shows the perceived holiness of the city of Rome and the person of the pope. Secondly, it illustrates, in a certain fashion, the religious isolation of Britain. That is, because Rome was the spiritual center of the Anglo-Saxon consciousness, dying there was more holy than dying in Britain. It is interesting to note that there were enough pilgrims making the journey to live and die in Rome that a community of Anglo-Saxons sprang up in Rome itself. As Matthews writes,

The English residents in Rome formed a sizeable body which was large or courageous enough to be specifically mentioned in the Saracen raid on Rome in 846... English residents in Rome tended to live in an area close to St Peter's which became known variously as the Saxon Burgh or the *Schola Saxonum*. It was never a formal 'school', rather an enclave in which fellow nationals could live with mutual support.¹¹⁴

111 Stephen Matthews, *The Road to Rome*, p. 12.

112 Stephen Matthews, *The Road to Rome*, p. 17.

113 Stephen Matthews, *The Road to Rome*, p. 17.

114 Stephen Matthews, *The Road to Rome*, p. 16.

The fact that so many Anglo-Saxons traveled to Rome, and that so many remained there to live and die, forged a further bond between the Anglo-Saxons and Rome.

As shown above, Anglo-Saxons traveled to Rome for a variety of reasons, however, the primary of these was for religious purposes and, as can be seen by the numbers and classes represented in Matthews's study,¹¹⁵ pilgrimage to Rome was a vital part of the Anglo-Saxon religious experience. However, pilgrimage to Rome offered more than simple spiritual betterment for the pilgrim; pilgrimage was also a method by which Anglo-Saxons were able to bring Rome back to Britain, whether in the form of relics, books, or any number of other items that these pilgrims took home with them. As Wilhelm Levison argues,

In the second part of the seventh century libraries with a wider scope began to be established. Benedict Biscop and Ceolfrid laid the foundations of the libraries of Wearmouth and Jarrow. Benedict on his journeys to Rome acquired books in Italy and Gaul, 'an innumerable amount of books of every kind', as Bede says on one of these occasions.¹¹⁶

Levison continues to enumerate the books brought to Britain from the Continent by other Anglo-Saxons including Bishop Acca and Bishop Cuthwine of Dunwich. An exemplar of this is Benedict Biscop, who, as Bede recounts, made several journeys to Rome with the dual purpose of pilgrimage and to bring books and other useful items back to Wearmouth-Jarrow.¹¹⁷ Not only did Benedict Biscop bring objects back to Britain, he brought craftsmen and monks back from the Continent to build his church and teach his monks.¹¹⁸ Many of the teachers that Benedict Biscop brought back to Wearmouth-Jarrow were from the Mediterranean and thus, the perceptions about Britain from the Mediterranean perspective were infused yet again into the monks at Wearmouth-Jarrow, which

115 Stephen Matthews, *The Road to Rome*, p. 59.

116 Wilhelm Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century*, (Oxford: 1949), p. 132.

117 'Cum enim idem Benedictus construxisset monasterium Britanniae in honorem beatissimi apostolorum principis iuxta hostium fluminis Uiri, uenit Romam cum cooperatore ac socio eiusdem operis Ceolfrido'. Bede, *HE*, IV.18, p. 389. 'After Benedict had built a monastery in Britain, in honor of the blessed chief of the apostles, near the mouth of the river Wear, he visited Rome as he had often done before, this time with Ceolfrith'.

118 Bede, *HE*, IV.18 p. 389. 'Accepit et praefatum Iohannem abbatem Britanniam perducendum, quatinus in monasterio suo cursum canendi annum, sicut ad sanctum Petrum Romae agebatur, edoceret.' trans.: 'Benedict received this Abbot John and brought him to Britain in order that he might teach the monks of his monastery the mode of chanting throughout the year as it was practised at St. Peter's in Rome.'

would, one imagines, have influenced the monks there, especially Bede. The number of pilgrims that have been recorded as having made the journey from England to Rome indicates the strength of Rome as a charismatic center, which follows, as has been shown, through the writings of Anglo-Saxon authors.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the Anglo-Saxon awareness of their peripherality in regard to Rome is that the isolation was not just passively received from the Classical and Patristic sources; Anglo-Saxon authors not only accepted it, but also actively re-imagined the concept in their own writings to further their own goals, as discussed above. Isolation and peripherality were used as a subtext, for example, in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and, as we have seen, Bede's self-awareness of peripherality makes his account of the conversion a story of reconnection to the wider world, indeed this is a theme throughout post-Roman literature written in Britain and it is possible to describe the emergence of the isolation of Britain as a central aspect of certain Anglo-Saxon authors' self-constructed worldview.

Anglo-Saxon authors' perception of the remoteness and peripherality of their homeland was grounded in the conversion by Augustine's mission which had been sent by Pope Gregory the Great. Having their conversion be directed by the pope himself created a reliance on Rome that came to characterize the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical world. Not only did the mission emphasize the charisma of Rome in the minds of Anglo-Saxon authors, it also created an image of Gregory the Great as the apostle of the Anglo-Saxons. The person of the pope came to play an important role in the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical world, both as the final arbiter of ecclesiastical disputes and as the focal point for orthodox spiritual authority.

Another aspect of the self-perception of peripherality in Anglo-Saxon England was the knowledge of isolation that was contained in the books that had been imported into Anglo-Saxon

England both with the mission and in the years immediately following the mission. These books brought the Mediterranean perspective of geography into Britain in the form of histories written by Classical and Patristic authors. Among these authors, Paulus Orosius, Pliny the Elder, and Isidore of Seville provide excellent examples of the perceived peripherality and isolation of Britain. The effect that this had, particularly in the first century and a half after the conversion, was to instill a similar awareness of Britain's location in the third part of the world, particularly in regard to Rome, in Anglo-Saxon monks, who would have read and used these imported books both in their training and in their own writings. Bede effectively demonstrates this awareness in the opening Book of his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, as described above. The effect that this had on the Anglo-Saxon spiritual landscape was to create reliance on Rome as the charismatic center of the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical world. Having established Rome in this role, much of early Christian Anglo-Saxon writing reinforces the charisma of both Rome itself and of the person of the pope.

It is interesting that Anglo-Saxon authors established a foreign place as the most significant locus, however, it is not unsurprising, given their desire to construct links and ties that would bring them into the heart of the Christian world. In order to do this, Anglo-Saxon authors actively used themes of isolation and peripherality in their own writing and by supporting the representation of Britain as extremely distant from the perceived center of their faith, they were able to argue that prior to the conversion they had been alone and on the edge of the world, adrift in *Oceanus*. By then describing the conversion with Pope Gregory's personal supervision, it enabled the Anglo-Saxons to establish an intense link not only to the Continent, but to Rome and the pope through whom they could build a tie to Peter and the apostles. This is in direct contrast, as we shall see, to the methods that the early medieval Irish used to construct their spiritual landscape.

Chapter 2: The Power of Place: Constructing Centrality in Early Medieval Ireland

Another island in the Ocean, Ireland presents a study in contrast to Anglo-Saxon England in terms of Irish authors' constructions of both ecclesiastical identity and geographical self-awareness. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Anglo-Saxons were concerned with their geographical and spiritual location, that is, they imagined themselves to be defined by their distance from Rome. Similarly, the early medieval Irish ecclesiastics were aware of their position at the edge of the world and like their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, they saw themselves as existing as *ociani insulae*¹¹⁹. The description of these places as 'islands of the Ocean', as seen in the previous chapter gives a sense of otherness to Ireland and Britain. The concept of otherness here is different from that in the previous chapter, however, for the Irish authors, the concept of otherness implied distinction. That is to say, rather than giving it the connotations of isolation and peripherality that the Anglo-Saxons did, the Irish were proud of their otherness. From a close examination of the sources it becomes apparent that early medieval Irish authors thought of Ireland as a charismatic center, which itself contained charismatic loci, such as Armagh and Kildare. Irish authors founded their ecclesiastical identity on the construction of Ireland as a central location and accomplished this in several ways. Primary among these was the establishment of Ireland as a holy place; Irish authors overlaid a sacred landscape onto the physical geography of Ireland, in order to create a sense of the holiness of Ireland. In doing this, they established a sense of centrality in the same way that the early Christians, and indeed Christians throughout the Middle Ages, constructed Jerusalem.¹²⁰ In fact, the description of Irish locations in early medieval Irish texts mirrors the depiction of Jerusalem by these same authors; though they never equate the two, early medieval authors' descriptions of these two locales demonstrates how they described what they perceived to be charismatic centers.

I will be using several important Irish texts in order to demonstrate early medieval Irish

119 Adomnán, *Vita Columbae*, edited and translated by Alan Orr Anderson and Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson (Oxford: 1991) ii.46, p. 460. 'the islands of the Ocean'. This comes from a description of a plague that struck Ireland and Britain in the seventh century.

120 This can be seen in greater detail in R.A. Markus, 'How on Earth Could Places Become Holy? Origins of the Christian Idea of Holy Places', in *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 2, No. 3 (Fall 1994) pp. 257-271.

authors' depictions of charismatic loci, all of which were written before the end of the eighth century. Each of these texts conveys a strong awareness that the idea of *place* in Ireland, that is a specific location in Ireland, was a fundamental part of these Irish authors' worldview. Names and locations of places within and surrounding Ireland occur with great frequency, and examples of this are two seventh century *Vitae* of St. Patrick, one by Muirchú,¹²¹ the other by Tírechán.¹²² Both of these works place heavy emphasis on locating events at places, a demonstration of which is that these texts combined contain 450 references to specific places, of which 414 are to locations in Ireland itself. The result of this concentration on *place* is a rich fabric of holy places in Ireland. The construction of spiritual geography can also be shown to be central to the early Irish ecclesiastical community through Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis*,¹²³ which contains nearly three hundred references to places, nearly all of which are in the Holy Land, concentrating on Jerusalem and the surrounding region. The depiction of these locales are on the same terms as the picture that Irish authors constructed of Ireland, which implies that these authors constructed centrality through the construction of spiritual landscapes centered on *place*.

Place-references serve a triple purpose in these texts. First, they serve to give the reader basic geographic information about where a particular miracle or event occurred: for example, that St. Patrick worked a miracle at the plain of Brega at Easter time. Secondly, they played a role in the ongoing debate during the seventh century about primacy within the Irish Church. By naming the cells, communities, and churches that St. Patrick established, for instance, the Church at Armagh attempted to establish control over St. Patrick's 'patrimony' in the seventh century.¹²⁴ Thirdly, by describing the locations of miracles, important figures and events, and the holiness of these places within Ireland, the Irish ecclesiastical community constructed its centrality, unlike the Anglo-Saxon self-construction of peripherality. That is, through the first two points, Irish authors created a richly

121 Muirchú, *Vita Patricii*, from *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, edited and translated by Ludwig Bieler (Dublin: 1979), I.8(7).

122 Tírechán, *Vita Patricii*, in *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, edited and translated by Ludwig Bieler (Dublin: 1979), II.3(1).

123 Adomnán, *De Locis Sanctis*, edited and translated by Denis Meehan (Dublin: 1958).

124 Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: 2000), p. 416.

populated and intensely localized picture of the holiness of Ireland with which to demonstrate their centrality, hierarchically speaking. In order to further illustrate this point, I shall examine several of the texts by these early medieval authors for their references to place.

Texts

The texts that will be examined in the course of this study come primarily from Ireland and all come from between the sixth and middle of the eighth centuries. Coming from the sixth century, two of Saint Patrick's own writings, the *Epistola ad Milites Corotici*¹²⁵ and his *Confessio*,¹²⁶ will be examined in this study. Each of these is important given that they are directly written by the 'apostle of the Irish'. They are also the only texts that are known to have been written by St. Patrick himself. The first of the seventh century texts is Muirchú's *Vita Patricii*,¹²⁷ which survives to the present in the Book of Armagh along with several other texts that will be discussed here. Muirchú's *Vita* owes much to Cogitosus's *Vita Sanctae Brigitae*.¹²⁸ Also in the Book of Armagh are Tírechán's *Vita Patricii*¹²⁹ and the *Liber Angeli*,¹³⁰ both of which were involved in the struggle for ecclesiastical primacy in early medieval Ireland. Cogitosus's *Vita Sanctae Brigitae*, briefly mentioned above, will also be examined in this study. This *Vita* is important as it is the earliest piece of hagiographical writing from Ireland and it is possible to see, even from a brief reading of this text, how later Irish hagiographers used this *Vita* as a model for their own writings.

Of these texts written by Irish authors outside Ireland, I will incorporate Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*,¹³¹ the *Voyage of St. Brendan*,¹³² and the *Epistolae* of Columbanus. Each of these texts is useful for their descriptions of places that are outside Ireland itself, but are either composed within the sphere of Ireland or written by Irish monks outside of Ireland, as in the case of Columbanus.

125 Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe, 'Epistola ad Coroticum', *BCCL*, p. 11.

126 Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe, 'Confessio', *BCCL*, p. 10.

127 Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe, 'Muirchú', *BCCL*, p. 84.

128 Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe, 'Cogitosus', *BCCL*, p. 84.

129 Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe, 'Tírechán', *BCCL*, p. 83.

130 Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe, 'Liber Angeli', *BCCL*, p. 105.

131 Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe, 'Adomnán', *BCCL*, p. 86.

132 Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe, 'Navigatio S. Brendani', *BCCL*, p. 111.

Columbanus presents a difficult case, however, due to the debate surrounding the authenticity of several of his writings.¹³³ Thus, only *Epistolae I-V*¹³⁴ will be used in this study, as they are the only letters by Columbanus which have been determined to be authentic. To determine how places well outside of Ireland were described, Adomnan's *De Locis Sanctis*¹³⁵ will be examined. While this appears tangential at first, the treatment of Jerusalem in Adomnan's work demonstrates how the Irish treated and created significant locales. In order to examine the construction of significant locations by Irish authors, I will begin by establishing the groundwork for the construction of early medieval Irish ecclesiastical identity.

Conversion

Discussion of early medieval Irish authors' construction of centrality begins with the process of the conversion of Ireland. This is where the initial similarities with Anglo-Saxon England begin to break down, as the Anglo-Saxons' conversion was defined by the understanding of the peripherality of Britain among those in the Mediterranean. The initial mission to Ireland, by Palladius, did convey some of these same overtones as Augustine's mission to the Anglo-Saxons, for example, his guiding principle was the prophecy in Matthew 24:14, which has been discussed in greater depth in the previous chapter.¹³⁶ Muirchú, of whom little is known other than that he was a seventh century Irish author, reinforces this perception, when he wrote that Palladius was reluctant to go

ad hanc insolam sub brumali rigore possitam conuertendam. Sed prohibuit illum quia nemo potest accipere quicquam de terra datum ei fuerit de caelo. Nam neque hii fieri et inmites homines facile recipiunt doctrinam eius neque et ipse longum uoluit transgere tempus in terra non sua, sed reuersus ad eum qui missit illum.¹³⁷

133 Neil Wright, 'Columbanus's *Epistolae*', in *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, edited by Michael Lapidge (Woodbridge: 1997), pp. 29-30.

134 Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe, 'Columbanus', *BCCL*, p. 166.

135 Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe, 'Adomnan', *BCCL*, p. 85.

136 'Et praedicabitur hoc evangelium regni in universo orbe in testimonium omnibus gentibus et tunc veniet consummatio.' 'And this gospel of the kingdom, shall be preached in the whole world, for a testimony to all nations, and then shall the consummation come.' From (Douay-Rheims).

137 Muirchú, *Vita Patricii*, p. 73. 'to this island in the cold north in order to convert it. But he was prevented from

Palladius was sent, as above, in response to concerns about a growing Pelagian movement in Britain. There are conflicting reports about his time there, however. For example, Prosper records that Palladius had converted Ireland to Christianity, and not only to Christianity, but to the Catholic belief.¹³⁸ However, Patrick's writings, as well as some of the later Hiberno-Latin writers seem to be a counter argument to this point of view. Patrick's existence as a missionary in Ireland alone calls Prosper's statement into question. Muirchú, who will be discussed in great detail below, argues that Palladius grew to dislike the cold, remote island and attempted to return to Rome, but was killed in Britain. Palladius's sentiment provides a clearer picture of the perceived remoteness of Ireland in the pre-conversion era. His mission might have resulted in the Irish Church having a similar relationship to Rome and the papacy as the Anglo-Saxon Church did. However, the triumph of Patrick's mission from western Britain prevented that relationship from developing. Hence Irish authors never defined Ireland and the Irish Church in terms of Rome as a charismatic locus and their relationship to Rome, but rather considered Ireland itself as a charismatic locus.

Origins of Irish identity

The roots of Irish authors' conception and construction of Ireland itself as a charismatic locus may be found in Irish social and ecclesiastical structures. To begin with, secular rule in Ireland was grounded in small, local kingdoms called *tuatha*, which covered a single valley or a plain. These kingdoms were part of larger kingdoms ruled by over kings (*ri tuath*), who, in turn, were ruled by kings of over-kings (*ri ruirech*).¹³⁹ *Tuatha* were ultimately founded on arable land and common grazing pasture, given that this was what was necessary to support a kingdom of any size.

¹⁴⁰ It is possible to exactly describe what comprised the *tuatha*, as defined in an early medieval Irish

doing so (by the fact that) nobody can receive anything from the earth unless it be given him from heaven. Neither were these wild and harsh men inclined to accept his teaching nor did he himself wish to spend a long time in a foreign country, but (decided to) return to him who had sent him'.

138 Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Palladius', in *Encyclopaedia of Ireland*, p. 853.

139 O Croinin, *Early Medieval Ireland*, p. 111.

140 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 102.

law text, whose author writes:

'Ni ba tuath gan eгна, gan eглuis, gan filidh, gan righ ara corathar cuir
ocus cairde do thuathaibh.'¹⁴¹

'that is no kingdom which has no clerical scholar, no church, no poet,
no king to extend contracts and treaties to [other] kingdoms.'¹⁴²

One large component of a tuath, in both the secular and ecclesiastical worlds, was the *derbfine*, which which was a complex kin group which included four generations back to a common ancestor.

¹⁴³ Locality in these *tuatha* was heightened in the secular sphere, because it was considered dishonorable for a layman to leave his *tuath*, whether for purposes of marriage, in that it meant that he was abandoning the territory of his family and ancestors, or to find a better life.¹⁴⁴ The locality and emphasis on kin groups was also reflected in the organization of the ecclesiastical community in early medieval Ireland.

Charles-Edwards argues that, 'it is undeniably true that Ireland had never been part of the Roman Empire, and also that the normal ordering of dioceses and provinces in such parts of the Empire as Gaul followed the imperial divisions of government'.¹⁴⁵ Due to this, Irish ecclesiastics constructed their hierarchy in a different fashion than the rest of western Europe. Monastic hierarchy in early medieval Ireland was constructed in similar fashion to the secular *tuatha*, as shown in the legal text referred to above. Because of this, a monastery that was located inside one of these kingdoms would have deep roots in the region. In fact, these monasteries were often composed of the same familial group that made up a *tuatha*¹⁴⁶ or a *derbfine*,

As in Wood,

It would seem, then, that it must often have been the family itself, probably the *derbfine*, that authorized the foundation of a monastery or even founded it by common action. The purest form of this would be a whole family offering all its property to God and establishing

141 Binchy, *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, in *Studia Hibernica* (Dublin: 1978), p. 1123.

142 Translation from: O Croinin, *Early Medieval Ireland*, p. 111.

143 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 86-88.

144 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 103.

145 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 242.

146 See Susan Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West*, (Oxford: 2006), pp. 140-147.

itself and its dependents as a religious community.¹⁴⁷

This seems to be counter-intuitive, in that it appears to only function as a short term situation, given that there could be no descendants to inherit the property and/or join the monastic community. However, given the sometimes blurry line between monastic and lay members of a community,¹⁴⁸ this may be, as Kathleen Hughes argues, the origin of many Irish monasteries.¹⁴⁹ As time progressed, a monastic organization based on church *paruchia* was established. *Paruchia* is an inherently rural concept, as opposed to the urban *civitas*, and is comprised of the 'territory subject to, but distinct from, the the episcopal church'.¹⁵⁰ However, in Ireland, the concept of *paruchia* expanded into a system of daughter-monasteries that were under the control of a parent-monastery. The *paruchial* hierarchy was not without controversy, however. As will be discussed further below, along with the primatial dispute, a large portion of the arguments used to establish primacy in Ireland were founded on various churches' *paruchia*, as well as on the construction of the charisma of the centers at the core of the dispute.

Perception of the charisma of places is demonstrated throughout Irish authors' works, primarily in their construction of the spiritual landscape of Ireland, though it comes into sharpest focus in the primatial dispute (to be examined in greater detail below). The early medieval Irish authors' sense of centrality flows through the majority of the works written in the seventh and eighth centuries and is demonstrated through a strong emphasis on locality; rather than focusing on their relation to the outside, as the Anglo-Saxons did, the Irish were much more concerned with internal geography. This is demonstrated through the preponderance of geographical references to places and regions within Ireland, as compared to those referring to places outside of Ireland. This strong sense of locality is demonstrated by Muirchú, in his *Vita Patricii*; this passage being an example.

147 Susan Wood, *The Proprietary Church*, p.141.

148 Richard Sharpe, 'Some Problems Concerning the Organization of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland', *Peritia*, 3 (1984), pp. 230-70.

149 Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (London: 1966), pp.75-6.

150 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 244.

Tum deinde Brega Conalneosque fines nec non et fines Ulathorum in leuo dimittens ad extremum in quoddam fretum quod est Brene se inmisit. Et discenderunt in terram ad hostium Slain ille et qui cum eo erant in naui et absconderunt nauculum et uenierunt aliquantulum in regionem ut requiescerent ibi, et inuenit eos porcinarius cuiusdam uiri natura boni licet gentilis, cui nomen Dichu... relicta ibi nauis apud Dichoin coepit per terras dirigere uiam in regiones Cruidnenorum donec peruenit ad montem Miss.¹⁵¹

This simple citation contains six separate references to individual places. Muirchu's description is entirely standard for these early medieval Irish texts, as illustrated in these selections.

From Tirechan:

Mittens autem Patricius Nieth Brain ad fossam Slecht, barbarum Patricii propinquum, qui dicebat mirabilia in Deo uera. Venitque Patricius ad alueum Sinone ad locum in quo mortuus fuit auriga illius Boidmalus et sepultus ibi in quo dicitur Cail<l> Boidmail usque in hunc diem et immolatum erat Patricio.¹⁵²

Also,

Patricius uero uenit de fonte Alo Find ad Dumecham nepotum Ailello et fundauit in illo loco aeclessiam quae sic uocatur Senella Cella Dumiche usque hunc diem, in quo reliquit uiros sanctos Macet et Cetgen et Rodanum praespiterum.¹⁵³

These descriptions demonstrate that not only does a strong sense of *place* permeate these early Irish texts, but also in many citations similar to the one above, the author strives to make his reader know intimately the lay of the land. Muirchú writes that the territories of Conaille and Ulaid were on Patrick's left side as he went into the inlet of Bréne. This attempt to connect locales in his work with his readers' knowledge of places in Ireland demonstrates the influence that place had in the minds of early medieval Irish monks, which had the dual function of reinforcing the perceived authority of

151 Muirchú, *Vita Patricii*, I.11(10), p. 79. 'Then, leaving Brega, and the territory of Conaille and that of Ulaid on his left side, he finally entered the inlet of Bréne. He and those who were with him in the boat landed at Inber Sláne, hid their small craft, and went a short distance inland in order to rest there. They were found by the swineherd of a man who was good by nature, although a pagan, whose name was Díchu... he left his boat with Díchu and set out on his way by land to the territory of the Cruithni until he came to Slíab Miss'.

152 Tirechan, *Vita Patricii*, II.17(1 & 2), pp. 137-8. 'Patrick sent Nie Brain to the Moat of Slecht; (he was) a native close to Patrick, who made miraculous true prophecies (inspired) by God. Patrick came to a lake in the Shannon, to the place where his charioteer Boidmal had died, and he is buried there in what is called Boidmal's Wood to this day, and it had been given to Patrick.'

153 Tirechan, *Vita Patricii*, II.23, p. 141. 'Patrick went from the well of Ail Find to the Mound of the Ui Ailello and in that place founded a church which is called Senchell Dumiche to this day; in that place he left the holy men Macet and Cetgen and the priest Rodanus.'

the saint in question, and it created a spiritual landscape that was intimately entwined with the physical geography of Ireland. By connecting these everyday places with holy figures, such as St. Patrick, the author establishes the physical reality of those figures. If a monk could walk to a place, such as the inlet of Bréne and know that a saint had walked the same path, it reinforces the power of that figure. The spiritual landscape that was created by the concentration on specific locations is the foundation of all later perceptions of centrality in early medieval Ireland.

Establishing the Spiritual Landscape

The construction of a spiritual landscape, which was laid over the physical geography of Ireland, is the cornerstone of early medieval Irish ecclesiastic identity and must be explained before this identity can be further examined. These authors established a spiritual landscape through their writings about saints and their miracles in which they put an extreme focus on local miracles and local places, which was a natural outcome of the monastic organization in early medieval Ireland. It is when combined with the number of locations that were described in these texts, that one truly begins to be able to picture the holiness of the topography of Ireland in the minds of these authors. The table below demonstrates how many place references there were in early medieval Irish texts, which serves to clarify the concept of spiritual geography.

Table 2: Place References in Early Medieval Irish Texts

Author	Ireland ¹⁵⁴	Britain	Others	Total References
Muirchú's <i>Vita Patricii</i>	70 (75.26%)	7 (7.52%)	16 (17.2%)	93
Tírechán's <i>Vita Patricii</i>	344 (96.35%)	1 (.003%)	12 (3.36%)	357
<i>Liber Angeli</i>	12 (92.3%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (7.69%)	13
St. Patrick's <i>Confessio</i>	7 (58.33%)	3 (25.00%)	2 (16.66%)	12
St. Patrick's <i>Epistola ad milites Corotici</i>	2 (100%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	2
Cogitosus' <i>Vita Sanctae Brigidae</i>	9 (81.81%)	0 (0.00%)	2 (18.18%)	11
Cummian's Letter <i>De Controversia Paschali</i>	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	17 (85%)	20
The anonymous <i>Voyage of St. Brendan</i>	21 (18.1%)	0 (0.00%)	95 (81.89%)	116
Adomnán's <i>Vita Columbae</i>	253 (78.32%)	45 (13.93%)	25 (7.73%)	323
Adomnán's <i>De Locis Sanctis</i>	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	293 (100%)	293
Total number of references	720 (58.06%)	57 (04.59%)	463 (37.33%)	1240

This table tells us that in beginning in the late sixth through the eighth centuries, the Irish ecclesiastical community was very concerned with *place* and the importance of places. It also becomes clear that by far most of the references are to places in Ireland, or locations associated with the Irish ecclesiastical community such as Iona. An implication of this is that these authors were concerned with events occurring in their own regions, rather than in events beyond their borders. This follows when taken into account with both the secular and monastic system of governance in place in Ireland at this time. Having populated Ireland with these holy places, Irish authors thus constructed both Ireland and specific places within Ireland in their minds as holy and central locales.

However, in addition to establishing the concept of locality in the minds of these authors this table demonstrates that, given the place that Jerusalem occupied in the medieval imagination, the Irish were concerned with the geographies of holy, or important locations. Thus, both Ireland and

¹⁵⁴ All references to Ireland, in the case of Adomnán's *Life of St. Columba*, also include Iona and associated islands.

Jerusalem have pride of place for the sheer number of times that they were referred to, and the dearth of references to British locales is consistent with the Easter controversy, that is, due to the belief by some Irish authors, such as Columbanus, that the Anglo-Saxons followed a heretical date for Easter,¹⁵⁵ Britain represented a hinterlands to the Irish monastic community.¹⁵⁶ However, it also shows the depth of the spiritual landscape in Ireland, which, as described above, is a direct outcome of the intense locality in the early medieval Irish monastic community. One of the direct outcomes of having established the sacred landscape of Ireland was that it created, in the minds of Irish monks, the idea that Ireland itself was a holy place.

As has been illustrated in the above discussion, Irish authors wrote about place with their readers firmly in mind. The specific function that tying important personages and events to specific locations in Ireland served was to make them more accessible and familiar to their readers and also to reinforce the spiritual landscape in their readers' minds. As established above, this was accomplished by intensely focusing on events and locations that occurred within the vicinity of the readers' monasteries, or to places that would be known to the wider Irish monastic community. Because of this, authors concentrated on local places and local miracles, which reinforced both the connection of saints to places and connected places to the wider patrimonies of saints. An example of this is Muirchú, who was concerned with having his readers picture the places that he described. By giving sailing directions, Muirchú created a more life like portrait of the places he was describing, which in turn, more firmly connected the places to his readers, which again strengthened the presence of these places and the events that occurred there. This is further demonstrated in Adomnan's *Vita Columbae*, in which Adomnan describes in great detail portions of the island of

155 Columbanus, *Epistola I*, pp. 2-7, esp. p. 5. 'Quare ergo tu, tam sapiens, nimirum cuius clarissima per orbem, ut antiquitus, sacri ingenii diffusa sunt flamina, Pascha tenebrosum colis? Miror, fateor, a te hunc Galliae errorem acsi scynthenium iam diu non fuisse rasum; nisi forte putem, quod vix credere possum, dum eum constat a te non fuisse emendatum, apud te esse probatum.' 'Why then, with all your learning, when indeed the streams of your holy wisdom are, as of old, shed abroad over the earth with great brightness, do you favour a dark Easter? I am surprised, I must confess, that this error of Gaul has not long since been scraped away by you, as if it were a warty growth; unless perhaps I am to think, what I can scarce believe, that while it is patent that this has not been righted by you, it has met with approval in your eyes.'

156 This is demonstrated by Columba's *peregrinatio* in Britain. For further reading, see Adomnan, *Vita Columbae*.

Iona. For example,

Alio itidem in tempore cum sanctus in Iova commoraretur insula,
sedens in monticulo qui latine munitio magna dicitur, videt ab
aquilone nubem densam et pluialem de mari serena abortem.¹⁵⁷

As can be seen in this citation, Adomnan is presenting a clear picture that anyone conversant with the geography of Iona should have been able to understand. This type of connection to the reader also appears in Cogitosus's *Vitae Sanctae Brigitae*, despite the dearth of specific place-references. Cogitosus connects with his reader through the establishment of Brigit at Kildare and through the type of miracles that she accomplished there. By concentrating on the pastoral care of the people in her *paruchia*, which also included miracles, such as bountiful harvests, Cogitosus builds connections with local readers at Kildare.¹⁵⁸ From this, it is clear that these authors were attempting to create a clear picture of places and events in their readers' minds, which, in turn, emphasizes the spiritual landscape that these authors were attempting to create. Thus, the construction of Ireland as a holy place filled with charismatic loci directly contributed to several distinctive features and controversies of the early medieval Irish Church, among which are the primatial dispute and the practice of *peregrinatio*.

Primalial Dispute

The primary ecclesiastical dispute in seventh century Ireland was what has come to be known as the primatial dispute. This dispute lasted from the early middle part of the century until the 680s, when Armagh converted to the orthodox reckoning for the date of Easter. The dispute itself was focused on the question of who was to be the head of the Irish Church, which naturally drew several claimants. Three main contenders vied for ecclesiastical primacy in Ireland: Kildare, York in the person of Wilfrid, and Armagh. Interestingly, and perhaps tellingly, each of the Irish

¹⁵⁷ Adomnan, *Vita Columbae*, ii.4, p. 331. 'Also at another time, while the saint was living in the island of Io, as he sat on the little hill that is in Latin called 'great fortress', he saw a heavy rain-cloud that had risen from the sea in the north, on a clear day.'

¹⁵⁸ For example: Cogitosus, *Vita Brigitae*, 5, p. 11. 'And as by her wise administration she made provision in every detail for the souls of her people according to the rule, as she vigilantly watched over the Churches attached to her in many provinces.'

factions based its claim on the holiness of locations, whereas Wilfrid, arguing for York's primacy, based his argument on his beliefs about his position as bishop of York. Thus, the inclusion of the primatial dispute is not only based on its significance in the minds of authors writing during the seventh century, but it also provides an invaluable point of access into Irish authors' conceptions of place. Let us begin, therefore, by examining how the eventual winner of this dispute constructed its argument.

Several of the authors and texts that have been examined in this study were deeply involved in the primatial dispute. Tírechán, for example, and the anonymous author of the *Liber Angeli* were both closely associated with the struggle of Armagh for primacy in Ireland, which explains why a great majority of Tírechán's place references are to monasteries and churches founded by Patrick, which implies that they fell under Armagh's control, given that the church at Armagh was Patrick's seat. Likewise, the *Liber Angeli* makes this claim for Armagh as an archbishopric.

Item quaecumque causa ualde difficilis exorta fuerit atque ignota
cunctis Scotorum gentium iudicibus, ad cathedram archiepiscopi
Hibernensium, id est Patricii, atque huius antestitis examinationem
recte referenda.¹⁵⁹

Armagh's construction of its claim to primacy was based, as in the above quotation, on the fact of its position as the seat of St. Patrick. His presence at Armagh sanctified that place and after his death, it enabled Armagh to take control of Patrick's patrimony, which appears to have been established in the same terms as the *tuatha* system outlined above. Authors supporting Armagh, such as Tírechán, constructed the patrimony of St. Patrick in their texts through references to Patrick's foundations, which included monasteries and churches that Patrick had established in his travels across Ireland. In enumerating all of the sites that Patrick had founded, authors such as Tírechán not only connected these sites to Armagh, it also tied them into the *tuatha* of Patrick.

However, even including the claim to Patrick's patrimony, Armagh was not able to truly establish its dominance until the church there accepted the Roman reckoning for the date of Easter.

159 Anonymous, *Liber Angeli*, section 28, p. 189. 'Further, any exceptional difficulty which may arise, (the law on which) is unknown to all the judges of the Irish, that is (the see) of Patrick, for examination by its bishop'.

As Charles-Edward argues

About this time, probably c. 686, Armagh declared its conversion to Roman orthodoxy. The way was now open for Armagh to defeat the internal threat from Kildare, just as the external threat from the English had come to an end with the battle of Nechtansmere. Armagh, not Kildare, was now to be the orthodox archbishopric of all Ireland... An orthodox heir of the apostle of the Irish, in possession of Roman relics, and with the intention of using elements of the career of Palladius to buttress his case, might now be safe from enemies both inside and outside Ireland.¹⁶⁰

As Charles-Edwards indicated above, Armagh was to become the head of the Irish Church. Even in the seventh century, there appears to have been some form of dominance at Armagh, as demonstrated by Cummián, in his description of Patrick as *papa noster*.¹⁶¹ Cummián's reference comes from his *De Controversia Paschali*,¹⁶² a letter intended for Abbot Ségéne of Columba and the hermit Béccán 'cum suis sapientibus'.¹⁶³ This letter, written in the middle of the seventh century, argues in favor of the Roman reckoning of the date of Easter. Cummián, therefore, provides a precursor to the conversion of Armagh and its ascension to the primacy of Armagh in the Irish ecclesiastical world. Armagh's construction of its primacy through the patrimony of St. Patrick is in direct contrast to the method that Kildare used to establish its claim.

Kildare asserted a similar claim for ecclesiastical primacy to Armagh's, having constructed its argument around a specific place as well. It is clear from his writings that Cogitosus thought of Kildare as being the primatial seat of Ireland, which he demonstrates this in his *Vita Sanctae Brigitae* where he writes that Brigit:

continued to grow in outstanding virtue and as countless people of both sexes drawn by the fame of her good deeds flocked to her from every province throughout the whole of Ireland and pledged their vows to her, she built her monastery on the plains of Mag Liffe on the firm foundation of faith. It is the head of almost all the Irish Churches with supremacy over all the monasteries of the Irish and its *paruchia*

160 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 438.

161 Cummián, *De Controversia Paschali*, p. 85. 'Primum illum quem sanctus Patricius *papa noster* tulit et fecit, in quo luna a .xiiii. Regulariter, et equinoctium a .xii. Kl. Aprilis observatur' (emphasis mine). Translation: 'The first is that which holy Patrick, our bishop, brought and followed, in which the moon is regularly observed from the fourteenth to the twenty-first, and the equinox from March 21st.'

162 Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe, 'Cummián', *BCCL*, p. 78.

163 Cummián, *De Controversia Paschali*, p. 57. 'along with their sages'.

extends over the whole land of Ireland, reaching from sea to sea.¹⁶⁴

Cogitosus's construction of Kildare, unlike Armagh, is based on a single place. He writes, as above, that people flocked to Brigit's monastery, which is how her *paruchia* was established. Kildare, therefore, constructed itself, based on Brigit's *paruchia*, as the only orthodox center in Ireland. Cogitosus's depiction of Kildare's claim demonstrates how these monks created themselves as a center. However, having established Kildare as the center, rather than constructing the entirety of her *paruchia* as a whole, when combined with the monastic organization of Ireland, meant that Cogitosus's writing was necessarily focused on a local audience, rather than to a more universal Irish audience.

Charles-Edwards argues that the primatial claim could only have been put forth after Kildare had:

adopted the Roman Easter but Armagh had not. Only then might Kildare be in a position to defeat the trump card being deployed by Armagh and acknowledged by Cummian, namely the status of Patrick as apostle of the Irish. Then, and only then was it possible to suppose that an orthodox archbishop, with his see at Kildare, might extend his authority 'from sea to sea'.¹⁶⁵

As described in this citation, the adoption of the orthodox reckoning of Easter must have occurred in the 630's, given that many southern Irish churches adopted Victorius of Aquitaine's paschal tables at that time.¹⁶⁶ Thus, It is only in the time between the 630's and the 680's that Kildare could have defeated Armagh's claim of primacy, by itself subscribing to the orthodox paschal reckoning. However, as illustrated above, Armagh had a very strong claim to primacy in Ireland and once it had removed the only block, paschal reckoning, Kildare was forced to submit to Armagh.

Wilfrid espouses his claim to Irish supremacy in a papal synod at Rome in 680. He makes this claim thus, though it was not read out in Rome until 704:

Wilfrithus Deo amabilis episcopus Erobboracae civitatis, apostolicum sedem de sua causa appellentem et ab hac potestate de certis

164 Cogitosus, *Vita Sanctae Brigitae*, p. 11.

165 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 428.

166 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 428.

incertisque rebus absolutum et cum aliis CXXV coepiscopis in
synodo iudicii sede constitutum et pro omni aquilonali parte
Brittanniae et Hiberniae insulisque quae ab Anglorum et Brittonum
necnon Scottorum et Pictorum gentibus colebantur, veram et
catholicam confessus fidem et cum subscriptione sua corroboraui.¹⁶⁷

Wilfrid's claim is based, Charles-Edwards argues, upon the political ambitions of the Northumbrian kings. 'The immediate context of Wilfrid's claim is both the secular ambitions of Ecgfrith, allowing Wilfrid to extend his 'kingdom of churches' northward among the Picts, and the Easter controversy'.

¹⁶⁸ The Easter controversy allowed Wilfrid, and the Northumbrian kings, to attempt to seize control of regions in the hands of those Wilfrid considered to be Quartodecimans, and thus, heretics.¹⁶⁹ This allowed Wilfrid to claim all of the regions of Scotland and Ireland that had not yet conformed to the orthodox paschal reckoning, which in Ireland was the northern half including Armagh itself.

Wilfrid's claim, as Charles-Edwards argues, makes sense if and only if, he believed that the northern Irish churches remained schismatic and heretical. Only then would they be disqualified from declaring the faith for themselves'.¹⁷⁰ Because Wilfrid was a proponent of the orthodox paschal calendar, he was able to declare the faith for them, which in his eyes enabled him to claim that territory, a claim that dovetailed with King Oswiu's territorial ambitions. These ambitions came to a head with the Northumbrians' unsuccessful attempted invasion of Ireland in the 670's. Wilfrid's claim to Irish primacy was frustrated, however, both by that abortive invasion and again in the 680's when Armagh was reconciled to the orthodox paschal calendar.

The arguments that these claimants used when arguing for primacy in Ireland speak, especially in the Irish factions' case, to their understanding of how locations could be leveraged to support ecclesiastic claims. The struggle for primacy in Ireland also demonstrates how the Irish constructed their identity through the construction of places as charismatic loci. The terms of these

167 Stephen of Ripon, *Vita Wilfridi*, edited and translated by Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: 1927), pp.113-5. 'Wilfrid, bishop of York, beloved of God, appealing to the Apostolic See about his cause, and absolved by its power from definite and indefinite charges, and with 125 other bishops called together in synod set in the seat of judgement, confessed the true and catholic faith for all the northern part of Britain and Ireland and the islands, which are inhabited by the races of Angles and Britons as well as Scots and Picts, and corroborated it with his signature.'

168 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 433.

169 Stephen of Ripon, *Vita Wilfridi*, p. 123.

170 Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 435.

arguments were based both on the specific places that comprised the patrimony, or *paruchia*, of a saint and also on the sanctity that the saint imparted to their own church. In Armagh's case it was Patrick; in Kildare's Brigit was the focus. By focusing on these saints, the churches at Armagh and Kildare were able to tap into the patrimonies of these saints, which formed both the foundation for their claims to authority and the basis for their understanding of their own centrality. That is, by connecting with these saintly figures, the churches at Armagh and Kildare inherited the charisma of their patron saints.

Comparison with Jerusalem

Having examined early medieval Irish authors' ecclesiastical identity construction and established Irish authors' construction of their centrality in terms of Ireland itself, it is now possible to demonstrate their perception of their place in the early medieval world. Given that Jerusalem was placed squarely at the center of the world in medieval authors' minds,¹⁷¹ it is unsurprising that the Irish ecclesiastics were concerned with Jerusalem and its environs. As O'Loughlin argues,

The most important contribution of *DLS* [*De Locis Sanctis*] to how the Latin world saw itself is that in that work Jerusalem's location at the centre of the terrestrial world was first explicitly established as a *geographical fact*.¹⁷²

Establishing Jerusalem's centrality in geographic terms enabled early medieval Irish authors to better relate to Jerusalem, given their own understanding of geography and locality. Adomnan's *De Locis Sanctis* is the primary text that will be used to examine early medieval Irish monks' relationship with Jerusalem, as mentioned in the citation above. This work was constructed on the first hand account of a monk named Arculf who had gone to the Holy Land and come back to Iona and told the monks there about his experiences. The amount of detail that Adomnan and his fellows were able to obtain from Arculf, especially in regard to the relative locations and specific

171 Evelyn Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, (London: 1997), p. 9.

172 Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Living in the Ocean', in *Studies in the Cult of Saint Columba*, edited by Cormac Bourke (Dublin: 1997), p. 19.

descriptions of places within the Holy Land, is similar to the types of detail that is normally provided for places within Ireland itself. For example,

De situ Hierusalem nunc quaedam scribenda sunt pauca ex his quae mihi sanctus dictauit Arculfus; ea uero quae in aliorum libris de eiusdem ciuitatis positione repperiuntur a nobis pretermittenda sunt. In cuius magno murorum ambitu idem Arculfus lxxxiiii numerauit turres et portas bis ternas, quarum per circuitum ciuitatis ordo sic ponitur: Porta Dauid ad occidentalem montis Sion partem prima numeratur. Secunda porta uillae fullonis. Tertia porta sancti Stephani. Quarta porta Benjamin. Quinta portula, hoc est paruula porta; ab hac per grados ad uallem Iosafat descenditur. Sexta porta Tecuitis. Hic itaque ordo per earundem portarum et turrium intercapidines a porta Dauid supra memorata per circuitum septemtrionem uersus et exinde ad orientem dirigitur.¹⁷³

Also,

Egredientibus de Chebron in campi latudine sita ad aquilonalem plagam haut procul a margine uiae ad sinistram occurrit pinosus non grandis mons tribus milibus a Chebron distans, de cuius pineto pinea ad Hierusolimam usque in camellis uehuntur ligna ad focos nutriendos; nam in omni Iudea, ut Arculfus refert, plaustra uel etiam curros raro repperiri possunt.¹⁷⁴

These descriptions of Jerusalem are comparable to the descriptions of places in Ireland that are presented by Muirchu and Tirechan in their *Vitae* of St. Patrick. For example, these accounts both provide specific information about places within Ireland. From Muirchu:

Stans autem sanctus Patricius in praedicto loco a latere dextero montis Miss, ubi primum illam regionem in qua seruiuit cum tali gratia adueniens uidit, ubi nunc usque crux habetur in signum ad uisum primum illius regionis, ilico suboculis rogam | regis incensum intuitus.¹⁷⁵

173 Adomnan, *De Locis Sanctis*, I.1 p. 41. 'I now propose to write a little of what the holy Arculf told me concerning the site of Jerusalem, omitting the matter that is contained in the books of others about the position of that city. In the great compass of its walls Arculf counted eighty-four towers and six gates, their order in the circuit of the city being thus. The gate of David at the west side of Mount Sion is the first, the second gate of the fuller's house, the third the gate of the holy Stephan, the fourth the gate of Benjamin: the fifth is a *portula* (a little gate, that is) from which steps lead down to the valley of Josaphat, and the sixth is the gate of Tecua. That is the order then when you make the circuit from the above-mentioned gate of David, northwards and then eastwards, through the spaces between the various gates and towers'.

174 Adomnan, *De Locis Sanctis*, II.12 p. 83. 'On leaving Chebron, on the level expanse situated towards the north, on the left, not far from the roadside, one comes upon a fair-sized pine-clad hill at three miles distance from Chebron. From this pine grove pines for firewood are transported by means of camels as far as Jerusalem. Camels I say, for in all Judea, as Arculf relates, wagons, or chariots even, are rarely found'.

175 Muirchu, *Vita Patricii*, I.12(2), p. 81. 'Holy Patrick, standing in the said place on the right flank of Sliab Miss, from which, on his return full of grace, he had the first view of the district where he had lived as a slave – to the present day a cross stands there to mark (the spot of) his first view of the district – he at once saw, right under his eyes, the

From Tirechan:

Plantauit aeclessiam super Vadum Segi et alteram aeclessiam
Cinnena<e> sancta<e> super Vadum Carnoi I mBoind et altera super
Coirp raithe et altera super fossam Dallbronig, quam tenuit episcopus
filius Cairtin, auunculus Brigtae sanctae. Fundauitque alteram in
campo Echredd, alteram in campo Taideni, quae dicitur Cell Bile
(apud familiam Scire est), alteram in campo Echnach, in qua fuit
Cassanus praespiter, alteram in Singitibus, alteram in campo Bili iuxta
Vadum Capitis Canis, alteram in Capite Carmelli in campo Teloch, in
qua sancta Brigita pallium cepit sub manibus filii Caille in Huisniuch
Midi.¹⁷⁶

Each of these citations demonstrates the type of description that Irish authors provided when giving accounts of events that occurred within Ireland. Adomnan's descriptions, via Arculf, of Jerusalem are also in direct contrast to the descriptions that he provides for Britain and other non-Irish places. For example, this presentation of Columba's time in Britain leaves many questions about where precisely Columba was in Britain, beyond the 'Spine of Britain'.

Alio in Tempore trans Britanniae dorsum iter agens aliquo in desertis
viculo agellis reperto ibidem juxta alicujus marginem rivoli stagnum
intrans sanctus mansionem faciens.¹⁷⁷

The variance in both detail and precision in the descriptions of Britain, Ireland, and the Holy Land may be indicative of centrality as constructed in the minds of Irish authors at this time. That is, having established Ireland's centrality through the depiction of significant locales, it is possible to extrapolate that these authors would have portrayed all charismatic centers in the same terms that they used for Ireland. Portraying Jerusalem in the same terms as these authors described Ireland created an implicit association with the Holy Land, at least in terms of the awareness of both Ireland and the Holy Land as charismatic centers, that does not have appeared to exist for other locations,

pyre of the king.'

176 Tirechan, *Vita Patricii*, II.16(1-3), p. 137. 'Patrick established a church at Áth Segi, and another on, of holy Cinnena, at Áth Carnoi in the Boyne, and another on Coirp raithe, and another at the Moat of Dallbronach, which was held by bishop Mac Cairthin, an uncle of holy Brigit. He founded another (church) in Mag Echredd, and another in Mag Taideni, which is called Cell Bile (it now belongs to the community of Scire), another in Mag Echnach, the place of the priest Cassanus, another in Singite, another in Mag Bili beside the Ford of the Dog's Head, another in Carmell's Head in Mag Teloch, where holy Brigit received the veil from the hands of Mac Caille in Uisnech in Meath.'

177 Adomnan, *Vita Columbae*, I.34, p. 277. 'At another time, the saint, on a journey across the spine of Britain, finding a hamlet among deserted fields, made his lodging there beside the bank of a stream that flowed into a lake.'

particularly Britain.

It is possible to determine that for Adomnan, at least, this connection to Jerusalem directly informed another of his works, that is his *Vita Columbae*. Jennifer O'Reilly argues for this model in her article 'Reading Scriptures in the Life of Columba':

In the *Vita Columbae* Adomnan also sketches a holy land, but at the northernmost edge of the Christian world where Christ's work of redemption, prophesied in the Old Testament, continued to be articulated through Columba. The veracity of the memorials to Columba enshrined within Adomnan's book is attested by venerable eyewitnesses in stories full of graphic details of time and place, of coastal weather and Irish names... by the topography of the island monastery of Iona and places in its area of influence made sacred by the presence of Christ in Columba.¹⁷⁸

By firmly constructing a holy geography both in the Holy Land and in Ireland through eyewitness accounts which were deeply rooted in specific locations, Adomnan, between his *Vita Columbae* and *De Locis Sanctis*, was able to demonstrate the imagined centrality of both Ireland and the Holy Land. Thus, the early medieval Irish portrayal of Jerusalem, when combined with their representation of Ireland, illustrates how these authors constructed the centrality of a place, given that the two are described in a similar fashion within the texts. Through of their use of place, these authors created a literary and spiritual center in the minds of their readers, rather than a physical center. An outcome of the construction of Ireland and Jerusalem as the key centers in early medieval Irish authors' minds was the devaluation of Rome in terms of spiritual authority, which enabled Irish *peregrini*, such as Columbanus, to regard Rome as being heretical in their calculation of Easter,¹⁷⁹ rather than viewing themselves as schismatic.

Asceticism

The construction of spiritual centrality in the minds of the early Irish monks is illustrated not only through specific references to place in the text, but also in their conceptions of Ireland and

178 Jennifer O'Reilly, 'Reading Scriptures in the Life of Columba', p. 86.

179 Columbanus, *Epistola I*, edited and translated by G.S.M. Walker (Dublin: 1957), part 3, p. 5.

Ireland's relation to the rest of the world. Most notably, these authors created an understanding of asceticism and martyrdom which is demonstrated throughout their works. Asceticism and martyrdom were understood differently in Ireland than in other parts of the early medieval world. Given that there were no heathens or heretics at whose hands they could suffer martyrdom within Ireland,¹⁸⁰ the Irish were forced to expand the concept of martyrdom to include ascetic practices. Thus, there were three types of martyrdom available to the early Irish clerics as outlined in the *Cambrai Homily*.¹⁸¹ These are:

white martyrdom, and blue martyrdom, and red martyrdom. This is the white martyrdom to man, when he separates for sake of God from everything he loves, although he suffer fasting or labour thereat. This is the blue martyrdom to him, when by means of them [fasting and labour] he separates from his desires, or suffers toil in penance and repentance. This is the red martyrdom to him, endurance of a cross or destruction for Christ's sake, as happened to the apostles in the persecution of the wicked and in teaching the law of God.¹⁸²

Given that there were no heathens in Ireland at whose hands these monks could have suffered the red martyrdom, they had to rely on the other two forms. For these monks, it is clear that the act of leaving Ireland was a trial, a white martyrdom, and that the ocean around Ireland constituted a desert, at least in the spiritual sense, as we shall see.

Thus, Irish authors and ascetics expanded the practice of absenting oneself from worldly concerns to take part in the ascetic life into the practice of *peregrinatio*, that is absenting oneself from one's homeland as a form of asceticism or as a way to begin the ascetic life. Stancliffe argues that 'the primary meaning of white martyrdom was the *martyrium cotidianum* of the ascetic life'.¹⁸³ However, as in the *Cambrai Homily* above, it appears to apply more specifically to the separation of the ascetic from his homeland. As in Lambkin:

180 That being said, *peregrini* sometimes did suffer physical martyrdom while on the Continent. For evidence of this see, Bede, *HE*, V.10 pp. 480-4.

181 Padraig O'Neill, 'The Background to the "Cambrai Homily"', in *Eriu*, Vol. 32, (1981), pp. 137-147.

182 *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus*, II, 246-7. Translated by Clare Stancliffe in 'Red, White and Blue Martyrdom', in *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe*, edited by Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamund McKitterick, and David Dumville (Cambridge: 1982), p. 23.

183 Clare Stancliffe, 'Red, White and Blue Martyrdom', p. 40. 'everyday martyrdom'.

‘Pilgrimage’ was the state which Columba had sought when at the age of forty-two he had ‘sailed away from Ireland to Britain, wishing to be a pilgrim for Christ (*pro Christo perigrinari volens enavigavit*)’. Others sought the same state of ‘living in pilgrimage’ with Columba. Saint Finten had ‘the purpose of leaving Ireland and going to our holy Columba, in order to live in pilgrimage (*ut nostrum sanctum Columbam Heverniam deserens perigrinaturus adiret*)’. Similarly, Áed surnamed the Black, came to Columba in Iona in order that ‘he should for some years be a pilgrim (*perigrinaretur*) with him in his monastery’. There he was eventually ordained ‘after passing some time in pilgrimage (*in perigrinatione*)’.¹⁸⁴

This is an important facet of Irish asceticism in the early middle ages, which developed in the early to mid sixth and seventh centuries, at roughly the same time in which many of these texts begin to emphasize the importance of places in Ireland. These two features of the early Irish church may be linked, given that as a place becomes holier and more beloved, it also becomes less suitable as a place to practice the ascetic life. That is, as Ireland became more un-desert like in the minds of these authors and their readers, it also became more difficult to be an ascetic within Ireland. Leaving Ireland as a form of asceticism was also rooted in the perception and understanding of the nature of priests in early medieval Ireland. As described above, a priest was a priest both inside and outside his *tuath*, whereas a non-poet lay person had no such status, which meant that in order to be more ascetic the priest had to actually leave Ireland.¹⁸⁵ Some of the most famous of the early Irish saints left Ireland on *peregrinatio*; Saints Columba and Columbanus are prime examples of this trend in Irish asceticism. Taken together, the growth in the importance of place and the idea that separating oneself from ones homeland indicates that the early Irish thought of their homeland as a center, despite its location at the edge of the world. Many of the monks who left on *peregrinatio* were attempting to find a desert in the ocean where they could live the ascetic life.

The idea of the ocean as a desert for the purpose of engaging in ascetic practice is shown especially in the writings of the monks at Iona and further demonstrated through the *Voyage of St. Brendan*. In Adomnan's *Vita Columbae*, direct parallels are drawn with the desert fathers, of whom

184 Brian Lambkin, 'Emigrants' and 'Exiles': migration in the early Irish and Scottish church', in *The Innes Review* 58, No. 2 (Autumn 2007), p.142.

185 See Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 103.

Antony is the particular model. Perhaps the primary comparison that Adomnan makes is never explicitly stated, however, it is the defining feature of both Antony and Columba's asceticism that they had to leave their homes and find a 'desert', whether actual or spiritual. Adomnan draws more explicit parallels in his *Vita Columbae*, however, these refer to specific miracles, rather than to defining characteristics. For example, in II.28, Columba renders all of the serpents on Iona harmless. After telling some of his monks that they would never see him again on the plain on Iona,

Quos hoc audito verbo valde tristificatos videns, consulari eos in quantum fieri possit conatus ambus manus elevat sanctas, et totam hanc nostram benedicens insulam ait: 'Ex hoc hujus horulae momento omnia viperarum venina nullo modo in hujus insulae terrulis aut hominibus aut pecoribus nocere potuerunt, quandiu Christi mandata ejusdem commorationis incolae observaverint.'¹⁸⁶

This miracle is shown by O'Reilly to have been taken directly from the *Vita Antonii*.

Christ's own promise to his faithful followers, 'Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions' (Luke 10.19), for example, is directly expounded in the *Life of Antony*. The saint shows how the monk may be said to trample serpents underfoot and render the demonic forces of evil and temptation harmless when, in devotion to Christ, he perseveres in monastic discipline. Such spiritual combat is conducted through the ascetical practices of fasting and vigils, by prayer and good works and the cultivation of inner virtues, particularly humility.¹⁸⁷

These parallels serve to reinforce the connection to wider Christian traditions of asceticism. Since there was no physical or spiritual desert in Ireland, and these monks found the spiritual landscape of Ireland non-conducive to even 'white' martyrdom, they had to absent themselves from their homeland to better fight the forces of evil.

Many of these monks, as outlined above, sought a desert in the ocean. However, a good number of *peregrini* went to the Continent. Of these, Columbanus is perhaps the most famous. Born in South Leinster, Columbanus entered the monastery of Bangor. From there he journeyed to the Continent, where he founded several monasteries including Luxeuil and Bobbio, both of which

186 Adomnan, *Vita Columbae*, ii.28, p. 391. 'When he saw that they were greatly saddened by hearing this, he tried to comfort them as far as might be, and raising both his holy hands he blessed all this island of ours, and said: 'From this moment of this hour, all poisons of snakes shall be powerless to harm men or cattle in the lands of this island, so long as the inhabitants of that dwelling-place shall observe the commandments of Christ'.

187 O'Reilly, 'Reading the Scriptures in the Life of Columba', p. 95.

became significant places in their own right. It is interesting to see that though these monks sought asceticism by leaving Ireland, those who went to the Continent often founded monasteries there. An interesting facet of these *peregrini* is that even while on the Continent and, in the case of Columbanus, in Italy, they did not travel to Rome and rarely were in contact with the pope. This directly contrasts with the sheer number of pilgrims that left Anglo-Saxon England for Rome.¹⁸⁸ Columbanus is an exception to Irish authorial trends, having written three letters to popes.¹⁸⁹ An explanation for this is that for Irish monks of the seventh century, Rome simply was not an important location. In fact, as Columbanus demonstrates in one of his *Epistolae*, the popes were looked on sometimes as being heretical, this holds especially true prior to the resolution of the paschal controversy.¹⁹⁰ This lack of regard for Rome was in direct contrast to the way Jerusalem was imagined in the minds of these monks, as has been demonstrated in further detail above.

Conclusion

Early medieval Irish authors constructed their ecclesiastical identities on the foundation of the belief that Ireland was a spiritual center. By creating a spiritual landscape which they overlaid on the terrestrial geography, which was filled in with saints and miracles, these monks built Ireland's holiness in the same fashion that Jerusalem had been by the early Christians. This association went further than simply similar methodologies, rather it appears that early Irish monks were actively associating themselves with Jerusalem, at least in terms of being aware of places as charismatic loci. Several factors led to these authors' ability to make their statement of centrality,

188 For more on this see: Stephen Matthews, *The Road to Rome: Travel and travellers between England and Italy in the Anglo-Saxon centuries*, *British Archaeological Reports Series* 1680 (Oxford: 2007).

189 These are *Epistolae I, III, and V* in Columbanus, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, Translated and edited by G.S.M. Walker (Dublin: 1957).

190 This is demonstrated in *Epistola I* to Gregory the Great 'Quare ergo tu, tam sapiens, nimirum cuius clarissima per orbem, ut antiquitus, sacri ingenii diffusa sunt flumina, Pascha tenebrosum colis? Mirir, fateor, a te hunc Galliae errorem acsi scynthenium iam diu non fuisse rasum; nisi forte putem, quod vix credere possum, dum eum constat a te non fuisse emendatum, apud te esse probatum'. from: Columbanus, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, p. 5. 'Why then, with all your learning, when indeed the streams of your holy wisdom are, as of old, shed abroad over the earth with great brightness, do you favor a dark Easter? I am surprised, I must confess, that this error of Gaul has not long since been scraped away by you, as if it were a warty growth; unless perhaps I am to think, what I can scarce believe, that while it is patent that this has not been righted by you, it has met with approval in your eyes'.

which differed so significantly from Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical identity. By filling Ireland with a conglomeration of saints and their miracles on an intensely local level, Irish authors were able to construct their island as a holy place from top to bottom. This had the dual effect of reinforcing perceptions of centrality that had roots in the process of the conversion of the Irish and forcing those wishing to pursue the ascetic life to leave the island either for the Continent, or go in search of a 'desert in the ocean'. Being forced to leave Ireland in order to be an ascetic is a strong statement that the Irish clearly understood their centrality; that is, given their reliance on Late Antique traditions of asceticism, Irish monks understood that they had to leave central locations in order to be able to be ascetic. Because these authors had so thoroughly constructed Ireland as a central locale, it was impossible to practice the ascetic life there. In combination with the equation with Jerusalem, Irish ascetic practice is perhaps the strongest evidence for the early medieval Irish conception of spiritual centrality.

Conclusion

Spiritual landscapes are created in a number of ways, two of which have been examined over the course of this dissertation. The Anglo-Saxon spiritual landscape, which had been constructed in direct reaction to the mission from Rome, was grounded in the Anglo-Saxon authors' awareness of isolation from the Continent and, in particular from Rome. In addition, their perceived peripherality was a function of their isolation and, in part, due to the construction of Rome as the charismatic center of the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastic world. By imagining Rome in this fashion, Anglo-Saxon authors reinforced Rome's centrality, which, when combined with awareness of Britain's isolation, heightened Anglo-Saxon authors' perceptions of peripherality. This is in direct contrast to early medieval Irish authors' construction of Ireland, which was grounded on the perceived centrality, in these authors' minds, of Ireland.

Irish authors created their spiritual landscape in the same fashion as early Christians constructed Jerusalem and its environs, that is, by populating their homeland with holy sites and holy people. In doing this, early medieval Irish authors overlaid a holy geography onto the physical terrain of Ireland, which had several outcomes, one of which was the perception of Ireland's centrality in these authors' awareness. A second outcome of this was an impact on the understanding of ascetic practice in the minds of Irish authors. Those wishing to pursue the ascetic life, due to their reliance on the model of asceticism laid out by the desert fathers, were forced to leave their homes, which, given the structure of the monastic community in Ireland and the construction of the spiritual landscape in Ireland, meant that these monks had to leave Ireland itself. In addition, a close examination of the sources demonstrates that Irish authors portrayed significant locations in the same manner, which is illustrated by comparing the way that these authors described Ireland and the way that they portrayed other places. For example, the Holy Land is depicted in precisely the same method that Ireland was. These spiritual landscapes, which were constructed in entirely different ways and served different purposes, still had the same outcome, which was to create an awareness

in the minds of both these authors and their readers of their people's and homeland's place in the world, both physically and spiritually speaking.

Anglo-Saxon England

The Anglo-Saxon spiritual landscape was rooted in the mission from Rome, which established a connection and reliance on Rome that characterized the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical community throughout the early Middle Ages. In addition the constant influx of both texts and personnel from the Mediterranean meant that the Anglo-Saxons were constantly being exposed to the Mediterranean worldview, which placed Britain in the far north-western corner of the world and imagined Britain as being dark, cold, and remote. This perception of their homeland became a part of Anglo-Saxon authors' own perceptions of Britain. Bede is a prime example of this, particularly in his geographical introduction to the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, where he describes Britain as being located to the north-west of the Continent, rather than, as one might expect, placing the Continent to the south-east of Britain. In addition, the appropriation of Gregory the Great by the Anglo-Saxons also created reliance on Rome. This reliance, which is demonstrated throughout Anglo-Saxon writings, reinforced the position of Rome in Anglo-Saxon authors' perception, which, in turn, reduced the spiritual authority of those in Anglo-Saxon England. Wilfrid's journey to Rome, over Archbishop Theodore's head, to reclaim his see at York is evidence of the place that Rome occupied in Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical awareness.

The place of Rome is also indicative of the perception of Britain in the minds of Anglo-Saxon authors. That is, by creating Rome as the charismatic center of the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical world, it created an awareness of the peripherality of Anglo-Saxon England. This peripherality was heightened by the Mediterranean infusions discussed above. Due to the importation of texts during, as well as in the century after, the conversion, Anglo-Saxon authors received the Classical Mediterranean picture of world geography, in which Britain was placed in the

third part of the world making it extremely isolated and peripheral. This perception, however, was rooted in the teaching of Latin, which opened the wider scholastic world to Anglo-Saxon monks. However, isolation and peripherality were not necessarily perceived to be a negative aspect of Anglo-Saxon existence.

The perception of isolation, in particular, is part of what drove the Anglo-Saxons' conversion in the first place. Pope Gregory the Great was concerned about the state of the Church in his day, especially in regard to the conversion of new peoples. His concern about the dearth of apostles in his day directly spurred his missions both to Anglo-Saxon England and to Sardinia, who had yet to be converted. Part of the inspiration for these missionary efforts was, as has been shown above, Matt 24:14, which implied that the world would not end until the word had been preached to all peoples. This prophecy, it is important to note, also was part of the inspiration for the conversion of the Irish 100 years earlier.

Ireland

Early medieval Irish authors overlaid their spiritual landscape onto the physical geography of Ireland. These authors constructed this landscape by recording precisely where each miracle performed by a saint occurred. In recording these places, these authors fashioned a spiritual landscape in the same way that the early Christians constructed the holiness of the Holy Land. By imagining Ireland in this fashion, early medieval Irish authors created a picture of the entire island of Ireland as a holy place, which enabled these authors to connect their readers to the local landscape. This had several outcomes that affected the ecclesiastical community as a whole in Ireland. Having constructed Ireland in this fashion, Irish authors became invested in the holiness of places, which were used as the foundations, as has been demonstrated above, for ecclesiastical disputes such as the argument for which ecclesiastical center was to be the primatial center of the monastic community of Ireland. Having constructed Ireland as a holy, beloved place and

establishing the Irish Church as being on equal footing with the Anglo-Saxon Church, Irish authors created a central, internally focused monastic community. The spiritual landscape of Ireland also forced those wishing to pursue the ascetic life to leave Ireland, either on *peregrinatio* or going in search of a 'desert in the ocean'. This is due, in part, to the early medieval Irish model of asceticism which was heavily based on the ascetic practices of the desert fathers, who believed that they had to separate themselves from all that they loved, in particular their homes, in order to be truly ascetic. For early medieval Irish monks, this meant that they had to leave their homeland, which had been constructed as a holy, beloved place and also due to the monastic structure of Ireland, which had been constructed in such a way that for a priest, the entirety of Ireland was his home. This concept truly encapsulates the early medieval Irish spiritual landscape, that is, Ireland was a central location for these authors and, presumably, their readers, on both the local, *tuath*, level and on the wider, Ireland as a whole, level.

Conclusion

The construction in opposition of these spiritual landscapes provides insight into the different facets that underlay both the Anglo-Saxon and early medieval Irish authors' ecclesiastical identities. The spiritual landscapes of these two peoples demonstrate fundamental beliefs that characterize these two Churches, both the perception of peripherality among the Anglo-Saxon authors and the creation of centrality by the early medieval Irish authors. Interactions between these two Churches heightened each of their perceptions of these spiritual landscapes. For example, Anglo-Saxon authors reinforced their reliance on Rome during the paschal controversy. Due to the perception of the Irish as heretical in this dispute, Anglo-Saxon authors constructed their belief along the Roman orthodoxy, which is entirely natural given how these authors had established their spiritual landscape. Irish authors, on the other hand, strengthened their belief in their centrality in response to a different ecclesiastical argument, though, like the paschal controversy, the dispute for

ecclesiastical primacy in Ireland involve the Anglo-Saxons. Like the Anglo-Saxon authors involved in the paschal controversy, Irish authors relied on their constructed spiritual landscape to reinforce their perception of Ireland as a charismatic locus, which was heightened in turn, by the reliance throughout this debate on the Irish spiritual landscape, that is the centrality of Ireland as established through the sanctity of places within Ireland. The establishment of the Irish Church as independent from any outside control put them on the same footing as the Anglo-Saxons or any other Church. The fact that these two peoples relied on their self-constructed spiritual landscapes to resolve major disputes demonstrates how key they were to these authors, and presumably to their readers.

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